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THE CRIME WITHOUT A CLUE

*By the same Author*

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MR. PASSINGHAM  
CARPET COURTSHIP  
THE JUDGMENT OF HELEN  
SCRUPLES  
THE BISHOP'S GAMBIT  
LADY GWENDOLINE  
SEVERANCE  
THE DISSEMBLERS  
THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD  
THE COMPOSITE LADY  
A CHANGE OF FACE  
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AMATEUR EMIGRANTS  
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FOR THE DEFENCE  
MR. BURNSIDE'S RESPONSIBILITY  
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THE SILVER BAG  
THE IMPOSSIBLE APOLLO  
MRS. WHISTON'S HOUSE PARTY  
A GIVER IN SECRET  
PRISCILLA TO THE RESCUE  
GETTING RID OF ANNE  
THE DECEPTION OF URSULA  
THE LATE MR. BEVERLY  
JOANNA SETS TO WORK  
WHO OPENED THE DOOR

etc., etc., etc.

# The Crime without a Clue

By  
Thomas Cobb

*Author of "Who Opened the Door?"*  
etc., etc., etc.

LONDON  
Francis Aldor

DRLAR


~~1654~~

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## CHAPTER I

### THE DEATH OF BASIL PURCELL

ALTHOUGH Digby Moulton was not consciously paying unusual attention to what was going on around him, it seemed a few hours later that every trivial occurrence since his arrival at the garden party that hot afternoon in mid July, was impressed with abnormal distinctness on his memory . . . Lady Redington welcoming her guests on the stone paved terrace behind the house; Elizabeth Dunlop on her left, bareheaded and conspicuous because of her brilliant red hair; Stephen Purcell, an attractive figure in flawless white flannels, his grey felt hat tilted on one side, tall, wide-shouldered, dark haired, with a cordial greeting for everybody.

Digby Moulton had been fortunate enough to overtake Mary Somers as she turned away from her hostess.

"Major Radford," she said, taking his hand, "has just been telling me that the temperature is ninety in the shade."

"Yet Miss Dunlop contrives to look delightfully cool," he answered, whereupon Mary looked up to his face with an intimate smile.

"Almost as cool as you!"

She had liked from the first his unhurried, self-possessed, self-confident air, and his fairness which made him look younger than Stephen Purcell, though he was a few months older, being thirty-three.

"I have never quite understood where Miss Dunlop comes in," he suggested.

"Wherever she happens to be the most wanted at the moment. She is one of those convenient persons who seem to be always on the spot. I fancy her father was related to Lady Redington in some way. Anyhow, she came to live at Redington Court a little more than two years ago—shortly before we came to The Grove. I can't imagine what Lord Redington would do without her, especially since his eyes have gone wrong. Elizabeth reads to him by the hour.

"Scarcely a very exciting occupation," said Digby.

"Well, she has no one to please but herself," answered Mary.

"She has plenty of money and a host of friends. She often

runs up to London and then, of course, Stephen spends a good deal of time here."

"Has Lady Redington never had a child of her own?" asked Digby.

"Only one, and he died ever so many years ago."

"And now," suggested Digby, "there's only a single life between Stephen and the title."

"What Dr. Gregory calls a very bad life," said Mary. "Of course, the last thing in the world that anyone **expected** was that Basil would marry."

"Rather a sell for his cousin."

As Digby spoke, Basil Purcell came out of the house, through which all the guests had to pass in order to reach the terrace. Like Stephen he was tall and dark, but there the resemblance ended. His pallid face had become too emaciated any longer to be described as handsome, and his eyes seemed to be sinking into his head. His gait created the impression of feebleness as he approached Lady Redington, whom he greeted without a smile.

Turning away with Digby Moulton, Mary walked down the slippery, grassy slope to the tennis courts, where for the annual occasion a number of small tables had been arranged, each covered with a fair white cloth with a plate of strawberries in the middle.

By this time the guests had ceased to arrive in such a constant stream and there must have been more than a hundred about the park. On a slight eminence to the right, the Carborough Silver Band was playing, and on the left stood a huge marquee, in and out of which passed a small army of waiters provided by Mr. Cotton, the old-established confectioner in the market place at Carborough, nearly three miles off.

Amongst their black swallow-tailed coats were conspicuous the light blue liveries of the footmen and the white caps and aprons of the maids, all being under the efficient control of Mr. Harvey, the butler.

Having passed the tables, Mary Somers, who knew the lie of the land, bowed to the dignified, urbane Archdeacon, then led Digby across an open space to the lake with its background of larches, but presently Stephen Purcell joined them, explaining that he had been sent by Elizabeth who was keeping places at her table.

A little later they were seated; Digby with his back to the marquee, Stephen opposite, with Mary on one side and Elizabeth Dunlop on the other. Taking off his hat, Stephen dropped it on to the grass by his chair, while Mary laid her silver filigree

handbag with her gloves on the table, while Elizabeth was trying to catch the eye of one of the busy, perspiring waiters. She succeeded at last and was giving her orders when Basil came slowly towards her, his dark jacket closely buttoned notwithstanding the oppressive temperature.

"You will find another chair in the tent," she exclaimed, and as he entered it, Mary shifted hers to make room, shifted nearer to Digby's, farther from Stephen's, an action which might appear significant to her mother at an adjacent table with Mr. Winter, the benevolent-looking, grey-bearded Vicar of Lower Marling, and Archdeacon and Mrs. Crawley.

The band was playing a selection from the "Mikado," there was a good deal of talking and laughter as Basil returned, dragging a chair, then sitting down, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets and resting his chin on his shirt front. His arrival seemed to cast a gloom over his companions and it was a relief to see the waiter return with a laden tray, which he managed so clumsily that Elizabeth removed some of the things on to the table.

He was turning away, when Basil raised his eyes.

"Hi!" he cried. "Bring me a whisky and soda!"

Elizabeth looked quite anxious.

"Do you," she asked, "know which is Harvey—the butler?"

"I can easily find him," answered the waiter, an intelligent-looking man of seven or eight and twenty, above the average height, with black hair and a noticeably blue jowl.

"Yes, please," she said, "and say you want the whisky and soda-water for Mr. Basil Purcell."

As he walked away, the empty tray hanging at his side, Elizabeth turned to her gloomy companion.

"You may have to wait a few minutes," she remarked, "while Harvey sends indoors——"

"God! What a place!" Basil muttered so ill-humouredly that Mary Somers was tempted to make an effort to bring him to a better mood.

"I thought we might see Miss Cathcart this afternoon," she said. "Is it really true that you are going to be married before the end of next month?"

To Digby's indignation, Basil looked at her with a scowl and the next moment deliberately turned his back, but fortunately the band, which had been resting the last few minutes, struck up again, and at the same time there was a general movement, several of the guests rising from their chairs and making their way to the open space between the tennis courts and the lake.



"Oh, I am so glad," cried Elizabeth. "Lord Redington must be coming after all."

"Was there any doubt about it?" asked Mary.

"He had a bad night," Stephen explained, "and this morning it looked as though he wouldn't be up to it. We sent for Gregory, but he wouldn't commit himself—said he would look in again at the last moment."

The cavalcade could now be seen advancing from the direction of the flower garden—the familiar bath chair, drawn by a well-groomed donkey with a youthful attendant at his head, while Lady Redington, carrying a large white sunshade, walked slightly in the rear.

Lord Redington, in his wide-brimmed panama hat, thick overcoat and almost black spectacles, looked fully twenty years older than his wife, and nobody expected that he would live till the same time next year, hence a keener desire than usual to do him honour.

"Why the hell doesn't that blighter bring my whisky?" demanded Basil, as the others rose.

"It will be here by the time we get back," urged Elizabeth, who was supposed to have more influence over him than anyone else at Redington Court. "You had better come now," she added, and as she waited by his side he got up from his chair with obvious reluctance, whereupon she took his arm, leading him towards the guests who had formed themselves into a line, along which Lord Redington slowly made his way, stopping at intervals to exchange a few words with Archdeacon Crawley, or Mrs. Desborough, wife of the M.F.H., or some of his older friends.

When Digby Moulton followed with Mary, nobody remained behind with the exception of the vicar and Mrs. Somers, who smiled rather sourly at her daughter while ignoring the man by her side. Of course Digby understood that he was not *persona grata*. Stephen Purcell, who had walked on alone, stopped as they reached him.

"Half a second!" he cried, and going back to the table, rested his foot on a chair, appearing to have some trouble with his shoe lace.

Meanwhile Mary, having reached the line, was talking to Lord Redington, who gave her his thin bent hand. It must have been five or six minutes later when Digby heard Stephen's voice behind him.

"Basil, old man, your drink's waiting!"

Without answering Basil disengaged himself from the group and walked away, and now a good many others also were return-

ing to their seats. Digby, however, stopped to speak to his old friend Major Radford, the Chief Constable of Carborough, but for whom, in fact, he would never have known Mary Somers or have come to Lower Marling

They had walked on again, and were close to the marquee when suddenly she rested her hand on his arm.

"Look!" she cried. "What can be the matter with Basil Purcell?"

It was not necessary to look twice to see that there was something very serious the matter with him. He was leaning forward, huddled up in his chair, while a small crowd had collected round it, Elizabeth and Mrs. Somers amongst it. Then they heard Stephen's voice.

"Find Gregory someone for God's sake!"

Little Dr. Gregory, however, was already running to the spot, accompanied by one of the other practitioners at Carborough, Dr. Thompson, a young-looking man in spite of his grey hair. Willing hands lifted Basil from his chair and bore him out of the glaring sunshine into the comparative coolness of the marquee. In the dimmer light Digby could see the two doctors on their knees, Major Radford standing a few feet away with Stephen, Elizabeth, and one or two others.

"Is he dead?" demanded the chief constable presently.

"Before we could get to him," answered Dr. Thompson.

"A stroke of some sort?"

Dr. Gregory gravely shook his head.

"Poison, I'm afraid," he said.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WAITER

DIGBY MOULTON saw that Radford, presumably by virtue of his office, had promptly taken command of the situation. A man of middle age and middle height, he managed to take enough exercise to keep a spare figure and he was always well turned out. This afternoon he wore a grey morning coat suit with a white top hat, and he had a sharp, incisive way of speaking which no doubt made a good many people think that he was exactly the right man for his job.

He had been in the army all his life till he obtained his present appointment five years ago, and the discipline of the force under his command could scarcely have been improved upon. He made no pretence to be a heaven-sent detective, but in the present emergency he felt bound to do his best.

It was true that an effort was required to imagine that a crime had been committed in such an environment. Fortunately, Lord Redington had gone back to the house, but the band was still playing a lively tune and some of the guests were not even yet aware that a disaster had happened.

Archdeacon Crawley, his wife, and Mrs. Desborough were spreading the news and suggesting that everybody should clear out, reaching their cars through the flower garden and thus avoiding the house. Digby went to fetch Mary's gloves and handbag, which she had left on the table, but when he raised his hat to Mrs. Somers, she scarcely condescended to notice him.

Major Radford was urging Elizabeth, who still looked a little dazed, to lose no more time in letting Lady Redington know what had taken place, and as soon as she had walked away, he suggested that perhaps Stephen would not mind telephoning to the police station for Inspector Rolfe and Sergeant Clowes to come to Redington Court at once. Meanwhile the chief constable ordered that the body should be laid on the top of one of the trestle tables to be carried indoors, but when Harvey, the butler, was on the point of accompanying the doctors, he was called back.

"I may want you to help me here," said Radford.

"Very good, sir,"

Seeing Digby talking to the old vicar and one or two others, the chief constable beckoned him.

"You were at Purcell's table," he suggested, "Suppose you point it out."

Followed by the butler they walked towards it, and presently stood looking down at the array of cups and saucers, plates, and at the empty soda-water bottle lying on its side on a salver. Very few of the guests were now left. In the front of the house, however, there was a good deal of congestion as the cars tried to get away. Inside the marquee the waiters stood in a group by the buffet, discussing the recent occurrence.

"Did Purcell have any tea?" asked the chief constable.

"No, he ordered a whisky and soda instead," said Digby.

"Did you actually see him drink it?"

"The waiter hadn't brought it till after I left the table."

"What," exclaimed Radford, "has become of the glass?"

It was obviously not on the table, and the three men stepped backwards, stooping to look on the grass beneath it. There, in fact, the tumbler lay in many fragments.

"It must," said the chief constable, "have dropped from his hand the instant he swallowed the contents."

"Still," urged Digby, "it surely wouldn't have broken on this soft grass—not into all those small pieces, anyhow."

"Someone," suggested Radford, "must have planted his foot on it. What do you say, Harvey?"

"Yes, sir. Seems so."

At all times a man of few words, Harvey, like more than one of those who had been present, looked as if he had received a severe shock. In one capacity or another he had lived at Redington Court more than thirty years. He had known Basil and his cousin Stephen since their schooldays. A delicate constitution had not prevented him from serving in the Army Service Corps during the war, but the experience had left its marks. Although barely fifty years of age, his smooth, short hair was already grey. There was a greyness also about his face, while he had a chronic stoop, which yet had no appearance of servility.

"Have those pieces collected," said Radford. "I will take them in my car. I saw Mrs. Harvey in the marquee."

"Yes, sir."

"You might ask her to attend to it."

"Very good, sir."

As Harvey walked away, the chief constable turned to Digby.

"Of course you can spot your waiter?"

"Without the least difficulty."

"Good. We'll have a word with him next."

On the way to the buffet, they met Harvey with his wife, who had been a parlourmaid at Redington Court when he married her twenty-four years ago—a tall, well-built woman with a great quantity of flax-coloured hair and one of the saddest expressions Digby had ever seen. She smiled faintly as she passed with a plate in her hand. Radford waited while Harvey pointed out the broken pieces of glass, then, as she stooped to pick them up, he rejoined the other two men, explaining that though there was a good deal to be done, the waiters seemed disinclined for anything but a discussion of the tragedy.

"Now, Digby, which is your man?" cried Radford.

They all turned towards him as he stood looking from one to another.

"He's not here!" he said at last.

"Not here! Are you certain?"

"Absolutely——"

"What was the man like?"

"Oh, there was nothing very remarkable about him. A decent-looking bloke. About seven and twenty, black hair, and uncommonly blue about the chin."

When Digby ceased speaking, a middle-aged man in a swallow-tailed coat stepped forward.

"Mr. Cotton's foreman, sir," Harvey explained.

"Well?" demanded the chief constable.

"I know the man you mean," the foreman answered. "But he wasn't one of our lot."

"Then who was he?"

"I thought he was someone Mr. Harvey had got in on his own," said the foreman.

"What about it, Harvey?"

"No, sir. Not likely."

On further inquiry it appeared that ten men had come from Cotton's in addition to the foreman, and that they were all assembled in the marquee. Major Radford had them lined up to be counted. It was evident that the man who had waited at Miss Dunlop's table could have had no legitimate business there. While Harvey had assumed that he came from Cotton's the foreman had concluded that the butler had co-opted him for the occasion.

Still accompanied by Harvey and Digby Moulton, the chief constable, feeling more deeply perplexed than ever, stepped from the marquee into the sunshine again.

"About the whisky and soda?" he said.



"I was looking after the men at the buffet," the butler explained, "when the missing party brought a message from Miss Dunlop."

"Did he know her name?"

"No, sir. The young lady with the red hair, he called her. My orders were that drinks were not be served till tea was cleared. They were indoors on ice, but I'd brought a decanter of whisky in case it might be wanted."

"Well?" urged Radford.

"I poured some into a tumbler and sent it on a salver with a small soda."

"You didn't send the decanter."

"No, sir,"

"Why not?"

"Her ladyship's orders, sir,"

"What were her orders?" asked Radford.

"I beg pardon, sir. Most private."

"Come," exclaimed the chief constable. "This is not the time to stand on ceremony."

Raising his hand Harvey rubbed his cheek with his forefinger.

"Her ladyship spoke to me some months ago," he explained, and Digby could not help noticing how feeble he looked. "Confidential, if I may say so, sir. The spirits were to be kept out of Mr. Purcell's way without his knowing. He wasn't to be refused—"

"I see," answered Radford. "Nor yet trusted with the decanter. You have it here?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Don't let it be touched till my men come along. The soda-water bottle, too!"

The two officers arrived while he was speaking, Sergeant Clowes having driven Inspector Rolfe from Carborough on his motor bicycle. The inspector was a rather pompous-looking man in uniform with a heavy dark moustache and dull eyes, but the sergeant wore a tweed suit, obviously of local manufacture, and appeared much more alert. As the chief constable took them towards the table, Digby felt that he was not wanted, and walked away.

## CHAPTER III

### DIGBY MOULTON

MR. DIGBY MOULTON was a man who intended to make his way in the world. After a good deal of reflection, and consultation with several friends, Major Radford being one, whose advice he had no intention to follow unless it coincided with his own opinion, he determined on a political career. He was fortunate enough to possess a fair income, together with consummate self-confidence, but as he had sufficient discretion to prevent this from becoming obtrusive, he passed for a modest, unassuming young man.

He had already made a reputation at the Union, and on coming down from Christ Church was always at the service of anybody in want of a fluent speaker at short notice. Although he had been called to the Bar, he had little influence of the kind which was likely to procure briefs, but he had a ready pen and his name was becoming known to readers of the more serious weekly and monthly magazines.

It was, however, thanks to his friend, Mrs. Vereker, that he had been selected to edit the letters of her uncle, the Right Honourable Denis Ellison, and, regarding the work as an opportunity to spread himself, he had made the book a success, though it is true that some of the members of the late privy councillor's family had accused him of a modern lack of reticence.

This by no means prevented the publishers from mentioning his name to Lady Finborough, with the result that he was commissioned, at a liberal honorarium, to write her husband's biography, and he was wading through the enormous collection of documents when he received an invitation for a week-end from his friends and his father's friends, the Radfords, at Hill Crest, half-way between the town of Carborough, renowned for its ancient abbey, and the village of Lower Marling, unknown to fame.

During the visit he was introduced to Stephen Purcell, Elizabeth Dunlop, and, especially, to Mary Somers, who he at once decided was the loveliest girl he had ever seen. Smoking with his host and hostess after the visitors had departed he gave

an amusing description of his recent futile contest in the north, and explained that he was only waiting for the general election to go in again, and as he fervently hoped, to win.

Meanwhile, having his work cut out, he thought of retiring to some secluded country place, where he could scorn delights and live laborious days, and break the back of the Finborough biography. Digby wondered whether Mrs. Radford knew of any rooms available in her own neighbourhood.

If she had for an instant imagined that his chief object was to see more of Mary Somers, she would unquestionably have said "no." But surely Digby Moulton was the last man in the world to fall in love at first sight, or after any number of opportunities, with a woman incapable of advancing his material prospects.

Not that Mrs. Radford had a word against Mary. Neither had anybody else. Quite the contrary. The drawback was that none knew who Mrs. Somers was, or anything about her, beyond the undoubted fact that she had made herself notorious by her manœuvres to capture Stephen Purcell for her son-in-law.

Taking Digby at his word Mrs. Radford admitted that she knew exactly the place. Although it was called "Corner Cottage," it was actually a quite decent house, occupied by Mrs. Harvey, the wife of Lord Redington's butler, and her daughter Ethel. It was the next house to Lower Marling church and, if Digby liked, Mrs. Radford would drive him that way when she took him to the station in the morning.

The consequence was that he took possession of the rooms on June the 24th, and before many days had a visit from the vicar, who found life a little dull since his son had gone to Calcutta, and his daughter had married. The hard tennis court, made for their benefit, was now at the service of any of the parishioners, and henceforth it became the happy meeting ground for Digby and Mary Somers.

Sitting by the open window of his sitting-room, smoking his pipe this Wednesday evening after the garden party, he naturally thought of the tragic event which had interrupted it. He had no wish to play the amateur detective. Nothing could have been farther from his ambition, but Basil Purcell had been sitting within a few feet of his own chair, and a quarter of an hour later was dead. It was impossible not to speculate; it was impossible not to realise the enormous change that had taken place in Stephen Purcell's circumstances. He had suddenly become the heir to an earldom and an income of goodness only knew how many thousands a year!

Remembering Basil's melancholy face, Digby could not ignore a suspicion of suicide, but then there was the waiter to be taken into account, his unexplained presence at the garden party, and his mysterious disappearance.

The man must have intruded for some nefarious purpose, though a fresh light seemed to be thrown on this by Mary when Digby met her in the vicarage garden at three o'clock on Thursday afternoon. Dressed entirely in white, with her short dark hair, tennis racquet in hand, she was already by the net when he arrived.

"You remember," she said, a few minutes later, "that I left my handbag on the table when we went to speak to Lord Redington?"

"I went to fetch it for you," answered Digby.

"On opening it this morning," she explained, "I couldn't find my purse."

"Was there much money in it?"

"Only thirty shillings in Treasury notes and some odd silver, but anyhow it had gone. And," Mary added, "my mother insists that the waiter must have taken it."

"In that case," suggested Digby, "granting he was a thief, I imagine it's less likely that he had anything to do with Purcell's death."

"That was what mother said."

"I suppose," Digby answered, "it's not likely the purse was stolen by anyone at your own house?"

She would not hear of this. There were only Mrs. Somers and the two maids, neither of whom could be suspected, and Digby considered the matter of sufficient importance for the police to be told. He offered to go over to Carborough during the evening, but, while he was taking off his flannels, Sergeant Clowes came to Corner Cottage to say that his presence would be necessary at the inquest at two o'clock on Friday, when, however, the proceedings at the Town Hall were likely to be of a strictly formal nature and an adjournment would be asked for.

The sergeant was impressed by Miss Somers' loss, and wondered whether there would be any more complaints, though none had reached the police station by the time he met Digby the following afternoon. The proceedings before the coroner did not take very long. Stephen Purcell identified the body, Digby described what he had seen at the table, Harvey explained that the whisky had been brought from Lord Redington's cellar, while Dr. Gregory and Dr. Thompson, who had made the post-mortem, agreed that death was due to poisoning.

by cardocine. Then the chief constable asked for an adjournment till that day week, when he hoped to have a report from Mr. Wilson Dring, the Home Office analyst, to whom certain of the dead man's organs had been sent.

The vicar had been so friendly to Digby that he had not the hardihood to cut the service on Sunday morning, but Stephen Purcell intercepted Mary and Mrs. Somers on coming out of church, so that he strolled along the road with Elizabeth Dunlop. She still showed signs of what he knew must have proved a terrible shock. Her unusual paleness made her numerous freckles more conspicuous, and the animation which was her characteristic charm, was entirely wanting. She explained in answer to Digby's inquiries that both Lord and Lady Redington were better than might have been expected.

"It must have been a severe blow for Miss Cathcart," he suggested.

"Ye-es," said Elizabeth, "we wired to Harrogate early on Thursday morning and Lady Redington followed the telegram by a long letter."

"Is Miss Cathcart coming to the funeral to-morrow?" asked Digby.

"She says she is not well enough."

"One can understand," said Digby, "that she might shrink from coming amongst a number of strangers——"

"Can one," retorted Elizabeth, but added the next moment, "she certainly wrote a very sympathetic answer to Lady Redington."

Digby formed one of the crowd in Lower Marling churchyard on Monday when, amongst a great many flowers, an enormous white cross was conspicuous, the only emblem on the top of the coffin, with a card attached,

"From Christine."

By Tuesday outside the churchyard nothing remained to show that there had been any unusual occurrence. Everything appeared to be going along precisely as it had done a week ago. The sun still shone brightly and people were remarking on the "wonderful summer"; the corn was ripening for the sickle and Lord Redington in his wide-brimmed panama hat, thick overcoat, and dark spectacles was to be seen about the lanes in the ordinary way. Stephen Purcell had been in London, but came back for the adjourned inquest on Friday.

On this occasion, the most important witness was Mr. Wilson Dring, who testified that the deceased must have taken enough cardocine to kill half a dozen men. The white powder, in which form the drug was generally used in medical practice, was



extremely soluble, and if administered in whisky and soda water, its slightly bitter taste would be scarcely perceptible. Mr. Wilson Dring had examined the remaining contents of the decanter without finding any foreign substance, but nothing had been left in the bottle which had contained the aerated water.

Another adjournment was granted, but the chief constable, walking away from the Town Hall with Digby, explained that that he should have to go to London the following day. The fact was that the coroner had been talking to him before the sitting of the court. He had hinted that a more strenuous effort might be made to solve the problem. At present, beyond raising the hue and cry after the missing waiter, little or nothing was being done. He strongly urged Major Radford to call in the aid of Scotland Yard.

"So I think on the whole," added the chief constable, "that I had better run up to-morrow and have a talk with Sir Wilfred Bird."

"Who is he?" asked Digby.

"One of the assistant commissioners and a very good friend of mine," said Radford, the consequence being that Detective-Inspector Bedison received instructions to go to Carborough, where he arrived with his suitcase late on Sunday evening and took a room at the "Swan," a few yards from the Norman abbey which attracted a good many Americans during the autumn.

The "Swan" was the principal commercial hotel in the town and after a leisurely breakfast on Monday morning, Bedison set forth to the police station in the market place.

## CHAPTER IV

### DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR BEDISON

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR BEDISON was the youngest of his rank in the Criminal Investigation Department. On leaving the Old Grammar School at Queen's Ladbrough, he had succeeded in obtaining a berth in the office of Messrs. Rance and Thwaite, the leading solicitors in the county, where he stayed till he was old enough to take the first step in what he regarded as his predestined career : . . to join the Metropolitan Police and undergo the necessary probation as a constable with the firm determination to become a detective in due course.

When the time came to hand in his notice, Mr. Rance offered to make him a present of his articles if he would stay, but Bedison had never for an instant regretted his refusal.

A long, lean man on the right side of forty, with rather sharp features, a sunburnt skin and hair between dark and fair, which almost matched it, he always made a point of being well dressed, and was nearly always urbane. He was undistinguished by any abnormally shrewd expression, so that it was possible, even if you were aware of his vocation, to talk to him without feeling you were being kept under close observation, as you probably were.

On entering the police station he was taken at once by Inspector Rolfe to the chief constable's room, a good-sized room, furnished with a leather-topped writing-table, and a number of pigeon holes, with a row of ledgers on high shelves. Wire blinds protected the windows, standing close to which you could see the central tower of the Norman abbey.

Being invited to take one of the wooden chairs, Bedison listened to Major Radford's account of Basil Purcell's death, afterwards feeling like a stranger who had heard a number of cut and dried statistics, without being able to form any clear view of the lie of the land.

To begin with there was not a single finger-print. Sergeant Clowes had tried the soda water bottle, but though its contents had presumably been poured out by Purcell, it had been handled also by Harvey, and perhaps by the waiter. In any case it had been impossible to obtain anything resembling a

clear impression, whereas the tumbler had been broken into a score of fragments and these had been trodden under the grass, probably by the men who carried the body into the marquee.

"I understand," suggested Bedison, "that you knew Purcell personally?"

"Ever since I came here five years ago. My house is within a mile and a half of Redington Court. Yes, I knew him well."

"Who actually lives at Redington Court?" asked Bedison.

"Lord and Lady Redington, of course. Then there's Miss Dunlop, a distant relative of Lady Redington's, and her two nephews, Basil and Stephen must have spent half their time there," said Radford. "Lord Redington liked to have them about him. His own son died before I came to the neighbourhood, but each of his three brothers had a boy—girls, too, for that matter, though they don't come in to it. Basil was the son of Henry, Lord Redington's eldest brother. Roderick, who came next, left a son name Everard, who married while he was home on leave from France in 1917, but got blown up in a mine after his boy, Norman, was born."

"Then," suggested Bedison, "Norman came next to Basil in the succession?"

"Yes. He was often here with his mother. Lady Redington was devoted to him, but he died just before last Christmas."

"And, after his death, there was only Basil between Stephen and the peerage?"

"At that time," said the chief constable, "no one imagined that Basil could possibly succeed. There didn't seem the faintest prospect that he would outlive his uncle. Not to mince matters, he was pretty well the limit . . . wine and women, inspector! Then after a bout of illness which I knew the doctor here thought would settle him, he suddenly began to mend his ways. By and by he astounded us all by announcing his engagement to Miss Cathcart."

"Does she live about here, sir?"

"No, no, with her father at Harrogate—Colonel Cathcart. A gunner. As a matter of fact she has never been in this neighbourhood."

"Not even for the funeral?"

"Not even for the funeral. Naturally she was a good deal upset, but she sent the most magnificent cross from London."

Bedison came to the conclusion when he had heard all the chief constable had to tell him, that he had never handled a case with a more complete absence of anything resembling a clue. As far as he could see at present there was absolutely no found-

ation on which to attempt to build. A vast amount of spade work would be necessary in the first place.

There was, of course, the possibility of suicide, whereas it could not be overlooked that Stephen Purcell had stood to gain enormously by his cousin's death. Then there was the so-called waiter, who might or might not have been merely an ingenious thief. The only evidence that he had come to the garden party to steal, however, was far from strong. No other loss but Miss Somers' had been complained of, and her purse might quite conceivably have been taken out of her handbag either before or after the fête.

The only feasible plan would be to make an intensive study of the circle in which Basil Purcell had lived, moved, and had his being. Such an investigation might possibly lead to the discovery of unsuspected undercurrents. Some secret episode in the dead man's own life might be brought to light; his marriage, for instance, might have threatened to interfere with the interests of some former associate. He might have been subjected to blackmail, threatened by an exposure, to which even death seemed preferable. What Bedison wanted at the moment, however, was a more detailed account of Basil Purcell's last moments than the chief constable was able to afford.

Already the detective had come to the conclusion that little help would be forthcoming from Major Radford, who had the reputation of being a strict disciplinarian and was no doubt a sane, clear-headed man of the world, unlikely, however, to be overflowing with pregnant suggestions.

Hearing that Bedison desired an eyewitness's report, Radford directed him to Digby Moulton, a personal friend of his own, who would be certain to give an accurate and unbiased account, so that, after a really excellently cooked chop at the "Swan," Bedison lighted his pipe and took the motor-bus which plied between Carborough and Great Marling, passing Corner Cottage on the way.

## CHAPTER V

### AT REDINGTON COURT

BOTH Digby Moulton and Inspector Bedison flattered themselves that they knew a man when they saw one, and each formed the most favourable opinion of the other at first sight. Mrs. Harvey had just finished clearing away the luncheon things, and her lodger was standing at the window looking forward to three o'clock when he hoped to meet Mary at the vicarage tennis court, when he saw a stranger at the green wooden gate.

A few minutes later he was called upon to repeat the story he had already told before the coroner, but in ampler detail.

"Then," said Bedison, when he had listened to the end without a word of interruption, "there were four persons besides yourself at the table."

"Four including Basil Purcell."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about any of them, Mr. Moulton?"

"Only about Purcell, himself."

"What was that?"

"His damned bad temper. He snubbed Miss Somers abominably," said Digby.

"You all left the table before the waiter brought the whisky and soda?" suggested Bedison.

"All but Stephen—I don't know about him. He was following us when he said something about his shoe lace and turned back to tie it."

"No one else was near?"

"Only the vicar . . . Mr. Winter, who was talking to Mrs. Somers."

"How far were they standing from Stephen Purcell's table?" asked Bedison.

"Oh, two or three yards."

"How long was it before you saw Stephen again after he turned back to tie his shoe lace?"

"Scarcely more than five or six minutes," answered Digby. "I didn't see him . . . I heard his voice behind me, he was telling Basil his drink was waiting."

"Obviously it must have been brought before Stephen left



the table," exclaimed Bedison, "or he wouldn't have known it was there. Now, when you next saw Basil—"

"He was dead," said Digby.

"Well, that's all I need trouble you about at present," answered Bedison, rising from his chair. "Perhaps you can tell me the nearest way to Redington Court."

It was already time to meet Mary and he had not changed into his flannels. Sometimes on hot afternoons, however, they would forgo tennis and wander through the pine wood at the end of the vicarage garden.

"I am going part of the way," said Digby, and accompanied Bedison along the road as far the church, on the left, stopping at the lych gate. "A hundred yards or so farther on," he explained, "you'll see a house with two gables and white rough-cast walls—The Grove—where Mrs. Somers lives. A little beyond that there's a stile, and if you cut across the two fields, you will come out a few yards from Lord Redington's lodge gate."

Having followed these instructions, Bedison walked along the shady avenue of beech trees, till a sudden curve brought into view the wide, low, grey stone house, to which he was admitted by the butler.

"Lady Redington?" asked Bedison.

"What name, sir?"

"Detective-Inspector Bedison, of the Criminal Investigation Department."

As a rule his name caused some expression of surprise, but this afternoon no face could have remained more imperturbable than Harvey's.

"I will tell her ladyship," he said, and waiting while he entered the room on the right, Bedison noticed that the hall extended without a break from the front to the back of the house, so that he could see the terrace through the glazed door, with the lake and the larch wood beyond.

A few moments later he was taken to one of the pleasantest rooms he had ever entered, with its three wide French windows protected from the glare of the sun by green rush blinds, its rather low ceiling and pictures forming panels on the walls. There was a profusion of flowers and the three occupants looked as agreeable as their environment . . . Lady Redington in a black dress, placid, plump, middle-aged, a little untidy with a wisp of grey-black hair falling over one side of her forehead, a newspaper in her hand and a pencil as she tried to solve a cross-word puzzle; Stephen Purcell, who had risen to receive the inspector, tall, wide-shouldered, small hipped, a little restless and

self-conscious, perhaps, and conveying the impression to the present observer that he looked a little too jaunty for a man of his age. He could scarcely be less than thirty-three or thirty-four.

But it was Elizabeth Dunlop who chiefly arrested attention. A single man, Bedison was by no means an anchorite, and there was something piquant about Elizabeth, something attractive and seductive, although he supposed no one would say she had any pretension to actual beauty. The most modern frock was incapable of marring her well-developed figure, and she appeared to be in half-mourning. As far as he could see her eyes were hazel and set a little obliquely in her head, which seemed to be aflame.

She was working at some kind of embroidery, which accounted for the numerous balls of coloured silk in her lap. Her rather short fingers moved briskly while he addressed Lady Redington, explaining that he was investigating the circumstances surrounding Mr. Purcell's death, and would be glad of any information. Resting the newspaper on her knees, she turned with a somewhat helpless expression to her nephew, who stood, arms akimbo, by her said.

"Suppose you give me a lead, inspector," he said. "Tell me where to start . . . what?"

"What time," asked Bedison promptly, "did Mr. Purcell arrive here on Wednesday the 15th?"

"I didn't spot him till he came out to the terrace," answered Stephen. "About four, should say."

"His train," Elizabeth interposed in her clear, low voice, "was due at Carborough at 3.15. The car met him at the station and he must have reached the house about a quarter to four. The train is often a little late."

She spoke with an air of decision . . . an excellent witness. Bedison felt that he could depend upon anything she said. She was the last person to make a mistake. For the moment she had ceased working, and she frowned slightly as if she were concentrating closely on the subject under discussion.

"Did you actually see him arrive?" asked Bedison.

"No, I was helping Lady Redington receive her guests out of doors, but I fancied he was late and ran in to ask whether he had come. He had gone upstairs to his room five minutes earlier."

"Did you notice anything unusual in his appearance when he came on to the terrace?"

"Oh well," she returned deprecatingly, "I thought he looked melancholy, as if he were worried—"

"Look here, Elizabeth," Stephen interrupted, "you may as

well get it off your chest. Inspector Bedison doesn't want any camouflage. He's out for facts. Anyone could see the poor old chap had been doing himself pretty well before he got here."

Elizabeth went on with her embroidery again, while Lady Redington noisily sighed, and for a few moments Bedison remained silent.

## CHAPTER VI

### A FEW MORE QUESTIONS

"WHO took off Mr. Purcell's clothes after the body was carried in?" asked Bedison as Stephen crossed the room and stood leaning against the grand piano.

"The two doctors between them," he answered.

"Of course the pockets have been turned out?"

"Sergeant Clowes and I went through them the same evening," said Stephen. "There was nothing of the least importance—a cigarette case, some Treasury notes and a few shillings in silver, a fountain pen, a pocket case—that sort of thing."

"No letters?" suggested Bedison.

"Devil a one."

"Basil," said Lady Redington, "was a man who never kept a letter. If he had one at breakfast time, he always tore it in pieces."

"Including Miss Cathcart's, Lady Redington?"

"Anyhow there wasn't a single scrap of writing on him," Stephen insisted. "You can see the things for yourself. As the sergeant didn't seem to have any use for them I made them into a parcel. If you would like me to fetch it—"

Bedison would not trouble him and now it was Elizabeth who suggested that the detective should sit down.

"Can you," he asked, "think of anybody who might have had a reason for resenting Mr. Purcell's marriage?"

"We were all jolly well surprised," said Stephen. "You know how it is. Old Basil may have given one or two—one or two old pals the chuck, don't you understand? Of course he had been playing the giddy goat till Gregory put the fear of God into him when he was ill in the spring. And a week or so later he told us he was engaged."

"He was to have been married next month," murmured Lady Redington.

"So that, naturally," suggested the inspector, "he had lately been in good spirits?"

Thrusting his hands into the pockets of his plus fours, Stephen stood more upright.

"I don't know whether you smoke," he said, bringing a

smile to Bedison's face. "Well, have you ever had to knock off for a bit . . . sore throat, or something of that kind. Poor old Basil came down from fifty gaspers a day to ten, with just a couple of small whiskies. Altogether it made him feel pretty cheap . . . what?"

"Had you ever heard him threaten to take his own life, Mr. Purcell?"

Lady Redington sighed again.

"Oh well," cried Stephen, "he would come down in the morning looking as if all the devils in hell were after him, and say he was fed up . . . that sort of thing. As a matter of fact," Stephen added, "I've not a shadow of doubt the old fellow did himself in."

"You didn't hear of any disagreement with Miss Cathcart," suggested Bedison.

"Remember," answered Stephen, "that we hadn't been seeing much of him since his engagement. Till the 15th he hadn't been here for nearly a fortnight. Besides, he never wore his heart on his sleeve."

"Miss Cathcart didn't come to the funeral," Bedison insisted.

"No," said Elizabeth.

"I must say," Lady Redington explained, "that nothing could have been more sympathetic than her letter to me. A terrible shock for the poor girl and I am sure if I had been in her place I should have shrunk from coming amongst strangers."

Elizabeth raised her eyes as if she had something to say on the subject but apparently thought better of it, and a few minutes later he was being shown out of the house by the butler.

"Was it you," he asked on the threshold, "who supplied the whisky and water for Mr. Purcell at the garden party?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see the waiter again after he left with it?" said Bedison.

"No, sir, I never set eyes on him. A great deal to do that afternoon."

The inspector made his way along the avenue, crossed the two fields, and was fortunate enough to be overtaken by the Carborough motor bus just beyond Corner Cottage. On reaching the "Swan" he rang up Dr. Gregory, who had not yet returned from his afternoon round, but would no doubt be home at half-past six.

His double-fronted house stood in the oldest part of High Street, and, standing at the door, the abbey could be seen at one end, the old Town Hall at the other. Bedison was taken to the consulting-room at the back, and as he waited for the doctor,



looked out at the astonishingly large garden. Gregory was a rubicund, cherubic little man, who shook hands as if he felt quite pleased, and admitted that Basil Purcell had been one of his patients, though he had not seen him professionally for a couple of months.

On parting from him after a fortnight's attendance, Gregory had warned him seriously that unless he mended his ways, his days were numbered.

"He didn't much like it," the doctor added, "but I succeeded in putting the wind up him, and from what I hear he really did try to turn over a new leaf."

"Do you," asked Bedison, "dispense your own medicines?"

"With a practice like mine one is bound to sometimes," was the answer.

"Where do you keep your drugs, Dr. Gregory?"

The little man nodded briskly towards a second door opposite to that by which Bedison had entered.

"In the surgery, inspector."

"Do you mind if I look at it?"

Dr. Gregory promptly stepped forward to open the door.

"Be careful!" he cried. "There's a step down—an old house you know."

It was a small room, painted entirely white, with a window and, like the consulting-room, two doors, the second leading to the garden. There was a sort of sink for washing bottles and so forth, a gas stove, and several shelves supporting rows of jars and phials.

"What do you keep here?" suggested Bedison, nodding towards a cupboard which projected between the garden door and the window.

"Poisons and one or two things I seldom use."

"I see there's a key in the lock," said Bedison, and, opening it, he leaned forward peering at the contents. From the upper shelf he took a four ounce glass jar, about half full of white powder and labelled:

Cardocine  
Poison.

"Enough to kill a few dozen people here, I imagine, doctor!" he continued. "The last time you saw Mr. Purcell professionally, you say, was about two months ago."

"I can look up the exact date—"

"You needn't trouble," cried Bedison, "but I should like to know whether by any chance he came to this house without seeing you."

"Well, as a matter of fact," Dr. Gregory admitted, "he called on the afternoon of the garden party on his way from the station."

"You didn't mention that at the inquest! "

"Why the dickens should I? What difference did it make? "

"He didn't enter the house? " Bedison persisted.

"Naturally he wouldn't, as he was told I was not at home. To tell you the truth I had promised to look at Lord Redington at the latest moment to decide whether he was fit to go out. He was very keen about it."

"May I see the servant who spoke to Mr. Purcell? " said Bedison, and while Gregory smiled, his voice sounded a little irritable.

"Good gracious, yes. See the whole household if you like," he answered, and leaving the surgery for a few moments, he re-entered the consulting-room with a healthy-looking girl, who had a white cap and apron and a rather frightened expression. "Step this way, inspector."

Bedison soon succeeded in setting her more at ease, and she remembered quite distinctly opening the door to Mr. Purcell that Wednesday afternoon and thinking how bad he looked.

"He wanted to see the doctor most particular," she added.

"Did you say he was not at home? " suggested the inspector.

"Yes, sir, I said he'd gone to the garden party."

"What did Mr. Purcell do? Did he go away at once? "

"No, sir, he looked at his watch and asked if I was sure the doctor had started yet and would I go and see."

"So you went! "

"Up to the dressing-room," she answered.

"Where did Mr. Purcell wait? " asked Bedison.

"I left him at the door," she explained, "but when I came down he wasn't there. He'd walked himself in here and taken a chair."

She was told that would do, and as she left the room Bedison turned to Dr. Gregory.

"Can you," he demanded, "form an opinion whether any of the cardocine had been taken out of the jar that afternoon? "

"Dear me, no," was the answer. "I couldn't pretend to miss an ounce more or less. The notion didn't occur to me. Why should it? "

## CHAPTER VII

### MISS CATHCART

TRAVELLING to London by the 9.10 train from Carborough on Tuesday morning, Bedison arrived at eleven, and went direct to Saint Charles's Mansions, Westminster, where after a few words with the manager of the building, he was taken by an attendant to Basil Purcell's service flat.

The man had known him well, but was unable to give any information of the least importance. He could not pretend to recollect whether Mr. Purcell had received any letters on the morning of Wednesday, 15th July, and of course the waste-paper basket had been emptied several days ago.

A thorough search of every room in the suite failed to produce anything more significant than a few receipts and unpaid accounts, and ultimately Bedison left the building no wiser than he had entered it. After a conference with Chief Inspector Rowlett at Scotland Yard, he went to his rooms at Gloucester Road, Regent's Park, where he put one or two additional things into his suit case, and the same evening stepped out of the train at Harrogate, where he engaged a room for one night at an hotel on the Stray.

It was too late to pay Miss Cathcart a visit, but he had no difficulty in finding her address in the Telephone Directory: Colonel Cathcart, R.A., 4 Birk Crag Gardens, which proved to be a sort of glorified bungalow, one of half a dozen recently built, and commanding an excellent view over the moors.

The door was opened by a middle-aged, one-armed man, unmistakably a soldier, and on hearing who the early visitor was, he entered a room on the right of the hall, a pleasant, cheerfully furnished room, with Colonel Cathcart leaning back in an easy chair smoking a long cigar and frowningly reading the newspaper, which seldom gratified him nowadays. Of medium height and stoutly built, what remained of his silvered hair was so closely cropped that at a casual glance he appeared to have none. He wore a clipped moustache, and his face, crimson in repose, was apt to grow almost purple in moments of excitement.

At the oak, gate-legged table in the middle of the room, sat his daughter Christine, about twenty-five years of age and

unquestionably a beautiful woman, with a voluptuous figure, golden hair, and eyebrows and eyelashes so dark in comparison that it was difficult to doubt that art had been called to the assistance of nature.

Before her lay an open writing-case, and as the door opened she looked up abruptly with her pen at her lips.

"A party to see Miss Cathcart," said the one-armed man.

"Who is he, Benson? Who is he?" demanded the colonel testily.

"Detective-Inspector Bedison—?"

Dropping her pen and blotting her letter, Christine leaned back with an imploring glance at her father, who rose with the newspaper in his hand. For a moment while Benson stared from one to the other, neither spoke, but then Christine seemed to be the first to recover self-possession.

"I suppose there's no help for it," she murmured. "He had better come in here."

"You think so, Christine? You think so!" cried Colonel Cathcart. "Hadn't I better have a word with him outside?"

She sighed as she shook her head.

"It's no use, dad," she insisted. "If he asked for me he wants to see me and I don't imagine he'll go without."

"Show the inspector in, Benson, show him in," said Colonel Cathcart, whereupon the man turned stiffly and left the room, ushering Bedison in the next moment.

"I daresay it's unnecessary to explain," he said, facing the pair, "that I am here in connection with the death of Mr. Purcell. No doubt you have heard—"

"Heard," the colonel interrupted. "Heard! Of course we have heard. But, bless my soul, what do you imagine we know about it all these miles away!"

"I want Miss Cathcart to be good enough to tell me," said Bedison, "what prevented her from attending the funeral."

Colonel Cathcart's face turned a colour which alarmed even the inspector.

"What the hell," he demanded, "can my daughter's absence have had to do with the murder? What can it have to do with you?"

"You assume," answered Bedison quietly, "that it *was* a case of murder."

"What was the alternative?" said Colonel Cathcart, while Christine, still seated before her writing case, audibly sighed.

"Suicide," suggested Bedison. "And what I am anxious to learn is whether anything had taken place between Mr. Purcell and Miss Cathcart that was likely to—"

He was interrupted by a passionate sob, and Christine, leaning forward, bowed her golden head and covered her face with her hands.

"Now, now, Christine," said her father, torn between irritability and sympathy, "pull yourself together, pull yourself together, my dear." As she continued to sob, he turned to the inspector. "An infernally painful experience," he exclaimed. "Anything we can do to help—that goes without saying. But I can tell you all you want to hear. You will excuse my daughter. Christine, you had better go to your room."

Rising now, she walked to the door, which Bedison stepped forward to open.

"No doubt," he said, "you will be in the way if I want to see you again before I go. You won't leave the house."

"Leave the house! Why on earth should she want to leave the house at half-past ten in the morning?" cried Colonel Cathcart, but by this time she was out of the room, whereupon he put his cigar back into his mouth and, finding it cold, flung it violently into the fender.

"She feels Purcell's death most keenly," he said. "Most keenly."

"Naturally," returned Bedison. "I understand the marriage was to have taken place in a few weeks' time."

Colonel Cathcart had a fit of coughing.

"To tell you the truth, inspector," he said, as soon as he recovered his breath, "it wasn't."

"But, surely, Miss Cathcart was engaged to Mr. Purcell!"

"Not at the time of his death."

"You mean there had been a—a quarrel," suggested Bedison.

"Sit down, inspector, sit down," said Colonel Cathcart, though for his own part he seemed far too agitated to remain in one spot. "I'm going to make a clean breast of it. Always the best way. I disliked the man from the first. I've seen too many of his kidney. Besides, I made inquiries. I did my best to put my daughter off, but there it was. I won't mince matters. She lost her head. A temptation, no doubt . . . Lady Redington and any amount of money. Anyhow, I couldn't prevent her from promising to marry the man, though I hoped and prayed the wedding might never take place. A woman may pay too high a price, inspector."

"Had you reason," asked Bedison, "to expect that anything in particular would happen to prevent the marriage?"

"A forlorn hope! There seemed just a chance. Since my wife's death, her sister has had more influence than any one else. A woman in ten thousand. She was due home from India



early in the month; as a matter of fact she landed on the 5th. Thank God she succeeded where I failed. She talked to the girl as only a woman could and not in vain, though a good part of the trousseau was ordered. It will have to be paid for. Purcell was here for the last time on Monday, Monday the 13th."

"Two days before his death," said Bedison.

"Quite. My sister-in-law was introduced, and after his departure on the Monday evening, she redoubled her efforts. Purcell was expected again on Friday, but when once Christine had determined to put an end to her engagement, she was naturally anxious to prevent him from coming. You can understand that, inspector. She wrote on Tuesday, and heard no more till Thursday morning. Imagine her horror at the telegram with the news of his death."

"Purcell," suggested Bedison, "must have received Miss Cathcart's letter on Wednesday—"

"Yes, yes, at Saint Charles's Mansions by the first post on Wednesday."

"Before he started to Carborough. Did Miss Cathcart," asked Bedison, "answer the telegram?"

"It said a letter was following. She was half distracted. I was upset myself. She waited for that till Friday morning. A very kind, sympathetic letter from Lady Redington. She entered fully into the painful circumstances, explained that there would be an inquest, and offered hospitality at Redington Court for the funeral."

"It was not accepted," suggested Bedison.

"A delicate situation, a damnably delicate situation," said Colonel Cathcart. "It seemed clear that Lady Redington knew nothing about breaking off the engagement. The question was: need she be told? I insisted that she need not. You may imagine in the circumstances that my daughter had no desire to face Purcell's people. She had never seen one of them, hoped now she never might. What was to be gained? In the end we ordered a handsome cross from London."

"You seem to have counted on the destruction of Miss Cathcart's letter," answered Bedison.

"Bless my soul, we were not in the mood to count on any mortal thing. We simply left it . . . took our chance. If the letter was found, well, we couldn't help it. But Christine insisted that he never kept a scrap of writing. Anyhow, she wrote to Lady Redington and expressed her sorrow. It was sincere enough, God knows! "

"And now," said Bedison, "Miss Cathcart believes that Purcell took his own life because she broke off the engagement."

"You know how it is," answered Colonel Cathcart. "Sometimes she thinks one thing, sometimes another. Damn it all, she would give I don't know what to feel certain she had no responsibility for the man's death. She is living in torment. Yet, how can she be blamed? For having any truck with him in the first place, yes, I admit she was wrong there, but not in breaking with him before it was too late. And let me tell you this, inspector. Purcell wasn't a boy! He had had plenty of experiences . . . what? Scarcely the man to break his heart for a woman."

Bedison was silent for a moment.

"Well," he said at last, "I'm afraid I must trouble Miss Cathcart again for a few minutes before I go, Colonel."

"Is that necessary?"

"If you have no objection," Bedison insisted, "I should like to see her alone."

## CHAPTER VIII

### A HINT ABOUT ELIZABETH

FROM first to last Christine had never had the slightest regard for Basil Purcell, but she had yielded to a great temptation. She had quickly become convinced that she had only to sit still for a fortune to fall into her lap, whereas Colonel Cathcart was a comparatively poor man, and devoted what money he possessed to the attempt to make his neighbours think he was better off than he was ever likely to be.

When once she became engaged and faced the prospect of a too early marriage, she tried to blind herself to the future by the excitement of ordering an elaborate trousseau, till her aunt not without considerable difficulty and plentiful tears, at last succeeded in appealing to her better nature. The fateful letter having after much tribulation been posted, Christine could not send back Basil's presents without a pang of regret; still they would have gone off at once but for the necessity to procure a suitable packing case, and by the time of its arrival she had received Lady Redington's telegram.

It was, however, not till she read the long letter on Friday morning that she learnt the tragic circumstances, learnt there was to be an inquest, that he had died from poison, which there was some reason to believe had been self-administered.

Now Christine had no peace. Basil had died within a few hours of the delivery of her dismissal. Had he taken his own life in consequence? Was she responsible for his death?

To go to the funeral was out of the question, and she eagerly adopted her father's suggestion that Basil's people need never know the part she had played. There remained, it was true, the risk of her letter being found in his pocket, but about that she was easily persuaded to wait and see. As to his parents, they must obviously not be parted with. She would put them away, never looking at them again. But she told herself that nothing would ever set her mind at rest.

Not poppy nor mandragora,  
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,  
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep  
Which thou owedst yesterday.

She should never sleep sweetly again! Though nothing further was heard from Lower Marling, Basil continued to haunt her thoughts, and now the arrival of the detective from Scotland Yard seemed the last straw. Hearing the word "suicide" on his lips, she had collapsed, and thankfully escaped from his presence, but in her own room upstairs, she began to think that after all she should like to see him again before he left the house.

There must, surely, be a shadow of doubt in his mind, and if so she would give the world to share it. If he had felt absolutely convinced about the cause of Basil's death, why had he taken the trouble to come to Harrogate?

So that when Colonel Cathcart tapped at her door and sympathetically broke the news that Inspector Bedison insisted on another interview, she powdered her face and went downstairs almost with alacrity. Seated and waiting for him to begin, her thoughts went incongruously back to the time a few years ago, when her father, over-anxious for her health, had taken her to consult an eminent physician. Now, as Bedison stood in his dark suit, looking gravely down at her, she was reminded of that interview in Harley Street. Although he did not look nearly old enough to be her father there seemed something paternal about him, something calculated to inspire confidence and set her at ease.

"Now, Miss Cathcart," he said, "I think I have learnt the precise state of affairs from the colonel. I understand that you are tormenting yourself by the notion that Mr. Purcell took his own life in consequence of your letter."

"If only I could really believe that he didn't," she murmured.

"Well," urged Bedison, "there's at least a doubt."

"But," she answered, "when my father suggested that Basil had been murdered, you contradicted him."

"Colonel Cathcart took too much for granted," said Bedison. "It ought to be regarded for the present as an open question, but it's impossible, as things stand, to prove that he didn't commit suicide."

"Shall I never know?" she cried with considerable emotion. "Shall I have to blame myself for his death as long as I live?"

"What we have to do," answered Bedison, "is to find evidence that someone else put the poison in his glass."

"Is that possible?" she demanded. "Do you think it can ever be found?"

"That depends obviously on the information I am able to ferret out. And there, perhaps, you may be able to help."

"If only I could," she said. "But what in the world can I do? I am utterly helpless."

"What I want," returned the inspector, "is to reconstruct Mr. Purcell's life for the last few months."

"I knew so little about it!" she exclaimed.

"Didn't he, for instance, at the time you became engaged, tell you anything about himself, his friends, his people?"

"Nothing," she insisted. "He simply asked me to marry him. I have never seen a single person belonging to him."

"Surely he talked of them! Please understand that nothing can be too trivial for my purpose. Did he never hint at anybody who stood to gain by his death, at any enemy, or anyone who had some fancied grudge against him?"

"Of course," said Christine, "his cousin, Stephen, stood to gain enormously, but Basil never thought of that. He always had a good word for Stephen. I should say," she added, "that Miss Dunlop is likely to know more about him than anybody else."

"Why do you say that?" asked Bedison.

"Oh well, she had lived at Redington Court for some time and he spoke as if he liked her. He used to say she was the most attractive plain woman he had ever seen."

"You don't mean to suggest that he himself was attracted by her?"

"Oh dear no! Far from that. He insisted that he was the only person in the world who had discovered her secret."

"Did he tell you what it was?" suggested Bedison.

"He often laughed about it. According to him, she was—well, she was in love with Stephen. Basil used to say that hers was not just an ordinary affair. A grand passion, he called it. He used to chaff her about it, till he found she was too much in earnest, and the unfortunate part was, that Stephen hadn't the remotest suspicion. In fact he was devoted to some other girl in the village—"

"Miss Mary Somers," said Bedison.

"I really don't remember her name. Basil declared she was quite lovely, but had a dreadful mother . . . if he ever confided his affairs to anyone," Christine added, "I feel certain it would have been to Miss Dunlop."

A few minutes later Bedison bade Christine "good-bye" and left Birk Crag Gardens without again seeing Colonel Cathcart. He found that he had just time to call at the hotel for his suit case before catching the up train, and on reaching London he put in half an hour at Scotland Yard before continuing his journey to Carborough. By half-past ten on Thursday morning he was sitting in the chief constable's room at the police station.



## CHAPTER IX

### BACK AT LOWER MARLING

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR BEDISON gave Major Radford a full account of his proceedings since their last interview on Monday, telling him of his conversation with Moulton, of his visit to Redington Court, and the recent journey to Harrogate.

He was like an author who, having conceived a plot for a story, wished to test it on a friend before taking it seriously in hand, and he watched the chief constable's face attentively, especially while describing his conference with Christine Cathcart.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Radford, when Bedison was silent, "it's more difficult than ever to resist the theory of suicide."

"No doubt," answered the inspector, "Purcell received Miss Cathcart's letter on Wednesday morning—Wednesday the 15th. Suppose we assume for the moment that in consequence of that, he determined to take his own life! He travelled to this place as he had previously arranged, and was met by the car at the station. He stopped at Dr. Gregory's on the way to Redington Court, and while the servant was inquiring whether the doctor was at home, he walked to the consulting-room, which opens as of course he knew into the surgery, where he helped himself to enough poison to settle several men. On reaching the house he spent ten minutes or so in his bedroom, then went on to the terrace, Stephen Purcell noticing that he had been doing himself pretty well. A little later he ordered a whisky and soda, and a few minutes after drinking it was found to be dead."

With one hand resting on the edge of the writing table, Bedison looked inquiringly into the chief constable's face.

"I see," said Radford, "that still you're not convinced, inspector."

"From your knowledge of him," asked Bedison, "was he the kind of man to take his dismissal seriously enough to do himself in?"

"Heaven knows! I should have been sorry to see him marry any woman I was interested in. But, remember this! Gregory had deliberately put the wind up him. The man was in a blue

funk. The devil was ill, the devil a monk would be. He wanted to mend his ways, and for all we know, marriage seemed the most promising plan. I'm not suggesting that he wasn't attracted by Miss Cathcart, but he may have looked upon her as a sort of means of salvation. And when she threw him over his last chance was gone."

"Granting he had come to the conclusion that life wasn't worth living, sir, why didn't he put an end to it at Saint Charles's Mansions? Why take the trouble to come here? "

"In London," urged the chief constable, "he hadn't the means. He knew the lie of the land at Gregory's, and travelled down to obtain them."

"Poison wasn't the only means," Bedison insisted. "It's true that since the Cumberland case last month the potency of cardocine has been in people's minds, but even assuming that Purcell came to Carborough as you say to get some at Dr. Gregory's, why didn't he take it at Redington Court? He could have ordered a drink to be brought to his room. Why wait till he was outside amongst the crowd? "

"There's something in that," the chief constable admitted. "Then you think we must ask the coroner for another adjournment to-morrow? "

"Undoubtedly."

"Of course," Radford continued, "there's no time, anyhow, but there's not the slightest question that if we were to produce Miss Cathcart as a witness and Gregory's servant the jury wouldn't hesitate to bring in a verdict of suicide."

"Well, sir, I should still have to go my own way," said Bedison.

"Where to, inspector? " asked Radford.

"There was a small group of people more or less in contact with Purcell on the day of his death," answered the inspector. "I felt bound as a matter of routine to start by following up the theory of suicide, but now I'm going to give a little attention to these four or five others—"

"Who are they? "

"Take those at Purcell's table," said Bedison. "Stephen Purcell, Miss Somers, Miss Dunlop, and Mrs. Somers."

"She wasn't with the others," suggested Radford.

"No, sir, but she stayed behind near the table after most of the crowd had gone to see Lord Redington. Besides, I've been picking up items of local gossip from the landlady at the 'Swan,' and one or two others. There seems a certain amount of mystery about Mrs. Somers."

"I shouldn't call it mystery, inspector. It's true that nobody knows much about her—"

"I'm told," Bedison persisted, "that she goes out in her car three or four mornings a week directly after breakfast and doesn't get back much before dinner. I don't want to lay too much stress upon it, but still there's room for inquiry."

"To me," cried the chief constable, "you seem to have hit upon a pretty unlikely lot."

"That's what I'm out for," said Bedison. "To discover something unexpected concerning an unlikely person. On the face of it no one but Stephen Purcell had the least interest in his cousin's death."

"You may safely eliminate him, inspector. I've seen a good deal of the fellow during the last five years."

"Still you can never tell what skeletons are hidden in locked cupboards," said Bedison. "You would never have imagined, for instance, that the central fact of Miss Dunlop's life was a thorough going infatuation for Stephen."

That was perfectly true. Apart from his own family Major Radford liked Elizabeth better than anyone else in the county. She was a great favourite with his wife and children as well as with most other people in the neighbourhood, rich and poor. He had a theory that most red-haired women were passionate, but he had never seen anything to cause the suspicion that Elizabeth was more deeply interested in one of the Purcells than in the other.

"I want to begin," Bedison added, "with a talk with Miss Dunlop. An excellent witness. Thoroughly to be depended upon, unless she were deliberately misleading. I understand that Stephen Purcell is keen on Miss Somers—"

"There's no doubt about that," the chief constable admitted.

"So that, accepting Miss Cathcart's statement, Miss Dunlop wouldn't be free from jealousy. She would have kept her eyes open and seen more about the people at The Grove than anybody else. Then, according to Miss Cathcart again, it's possible she was to a certain extent in Basil Purcell's confidence."

"In fact," exclaimed the chief constable with a laugh, "you're on the look out for a sort of *crime passionnel*, inspector!"

"I'm like a blindfolded man groping for the first he can catch, sir. Groping for a motive very much in the dark at present. The difficulty is to get Miss Dunlop alone."

"You have only to go to Redington Court."

"But should I find my opportunity? I can't say I want to speak to her privately without attracting attention. The last thing that's desirable. I thought perhaps, you could help me."

For a few moments the chief constable sat drumming the writing-table with his fingers.

"I don't know what my wife would say," he answered at last. "It's true she's expecting Miss Dunlop this afternoon—"

"Just the chance," said Bedison, but still Major Radford looked doubtful.

"Well," he suggested, stretching out his hand for the telephone, "I'll hear what she thinks."

Rising from his chair, Bedison walked to the window as if to hear as little as possible of the chief constable's conversation with Mrs. Radford.

"You had better," he said, replacing the instrument, "get to my place at about half past four. My wife will tell Miss Dunlop you're coming, but insists that no pressure must be put upon her. She can see you or not as she pleases. If she refuses, you will have had your trouble for nothing."

"She won't refuse," Bedison insisted. "I give Miss Dunlop credit for plenty of courage—even audacity. If she's keeping anything in the background—"

"An inconceivable proposition if you mean anything connected with Purcell's death," cried Radford. "What the dickens could she have to keep?"

"Anyhow, if she had I don't fancy it would prevent her from facing the music," was the answer. "If she hasn't, a sort of spirit of adventure would tempt her to see me."

## CHAPTER X

### AT HILL CREST

THE chief constable on being appointed five years ago had been fortunate in finding Hill Crest, one of the pleasantest of the smaller houses in the neighbourhood of Carborough, untenanted. Built of red brick, it stood on high ground, being surrounded by a large garden. This Thursday afternoon, Mrs. Radford was entertaining Elizabeth at tea on the lawn, the children, to their disappointment, not being allowed to be present as usual.

"My dear," she said, "I don't know what you will think, though you must really blame my husband. He rang me up this morning to say that Inspector Bedison is pining for an opportunity to speak to you."

Elizabeth held her head on one side and raised her eyebrows with an expression of perplexed inquiry.

"What is the matter with Redington Court?" she asked

"As far as I understand," said Mrs. Radford, "he was afraid he mightn't have the felicity of seeing you alone there."

"Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Elizabeth. "Not that I have the slightest objection. I rather liked the man. I had no idea detectives were like that."

"He is to be here at half-past four," said Mrs. Radford, and on his arrival he was taken to the pleasant morning room, where Elizabeth was already seated.

"You must, surely," she exclaimed, cutting short his apologetic introduction, "have something extraordinarily important to say. Won't you sit down?"

"I simply want to ask you one or two questions," he explained. "You can understand that I am anxious to learn all that's possible about Mr. Purcell's more intimate circle. You must have been in the midst of it—"

"Since he became engaged to Miss Cathcart," returned Elizabeth, "we saw much less of him at Redington Court."

"But before then," urged Bedison. "It's not only his own movements I'm interested in."

"Whose besides?" she asked.

"For instance—Mrs. Somers!"

"I don't see where she comes in," murmured Elizabeth.



"Perhaps, nowhere," he admitted. "I am picking up various loose threads and testing them. If I wanted to know anything about yourself, I might question her. As I feel curious about Mrs. Somers, I am venturing to question you."

"But you can't imagine she had the slightest shadow of connection with Basil's death!"

"Can you tell me," said Bedison, "where she goes three or four times a week, without even taking her daughter?"

"Everybody knows," Elizabeth explained, "that the two are not very good pals. When Mrs. Somers took The Grove two years ago Mary was at St. Kilda's School. A friend of my own there at the same time—Catherine Holden. She stayed with the Somerses just before Christmas, and told me how tremendously popular Mary used to be. She was the head girl and didn't leave till she was nineteen."

"And," said Bedison, "shortly after she came to Lower Marling, I believe that Mr. Stephen Purcell began to pay her a good deal of attention."

Bedison took care to employ his most casual tone. Nothing in his voice or manner was in the least likely to suggest that he suspected her own intense interest in Stephen. Yet from the moment of the inspector's arrival this afternoon, it was never out of his mind. He quite understood the reason that her cheeks now grew as red as her hair.

"I—I suppose he did," she admitted.

"At that time," Bedison persisted, "Stephen Purcell could scarcely have been considered particularly eligible."

"Oh, well," answered Elizabeth with a shrug, "everybody knew he had been shockingly extravagant. He had run through the money he had from his father, and he made no secret of the fact that he was over head and ears in debt."

"Strange," suggested Bedison, "that Mrs. Somers allowed him to see so much of her daughter."

"Not at all," said Elizabeth. "To begin with she was away a good deal and I don't imagine she realized what Stephen's position actually was. He had rooms in London. He was constantly at Redington Court. Besides—you have seen him! Wouldn't anyone imagine he owned the world? Still she must have had her eyes opened by and by, and then she promptly forbade him her house. That no doubt had something to do with his determination to go abroad."

"When did he say he was going, Miss Dunlop?"

"Oh, it was about the middle of last January."

"Obviously, he changed his mind!"

Bedison was employing his imagination to fill in the gaps.

He had no doubt that Stephen's threatened emigration had been a serious grief for Elizabeth, for although she might consider her own case hopeless, she would have preferred to keep him in England rather than lose sight of him altogether.

The circumstance that he had been a spendthrift evidently made him no less attractive in her eyes. As long as he had money in his purse he was probably the type who would never dream of working, though necessity might drive him to turn his hand to something useful in a new country.

"He was within a week of sailing," Elizabeth explained. "His state room was booked, when we all received a terrible shock. About the middle of January Lady Redington had a telegram from Mrs. Everard Purcell to say that poor little Norman was dead."

"That, of course, greatly improved Mr. Stephen Purcell's prospects," suggested Bedison, "especially as his cousin was in poor health. So, on account of Norman's death, he gave up the idea of leaving England?"

"It came about very—very curiously," said Elizabeth. "You see that, though Stephen's prospects had so much improved, he was no more able to carry on than he had been before poor Norman's death. Lord Redington made Basil a handsome allowance, as his heir, but Stephen never had a penny from him. I didn't imagine for a moment that he would be able to stay in England, and he was so—so independent that no one dared to offer help."

"Was there anyone in a position to do that?" suggested Bedison, whereupon Elizabeth looked for a moment quite painfully self-conscious, yet she could not suspect what he knew, or even that he had seen Miss Cathcart. But knowing that Elizabeth had a good income of her own, he assumed that she would have been only too willing to place it at Stephen's disposal, nor did Bedison believe she was prevented by his "independence" so much as by the fear of giving herself away.

Forewarned as the inspector had been at Harrogate, he was able to read Elizabeth's innermost thoughts with a certainty not free from cruelty, while she, convinced of the inviolability of her great secret, scarcely hesitated about what she was saying.

The circumstance that he was determined to get all the information possible from her, by no means made him unsympathetic. He did not agree with Basil Purcell, as reported by Christine Cathcart, that she was the most attractive of plain women. Attractive, yes, but he could not admit the plainness! It was true that he had not yet seen Miss Mary

Somers, but he could not help marvelling that Stephen, having spent half his time at Redington Court during the last two years, should have remained blind to Elizabeth's piquant charm.

"And granting," said Bedison, as she remained silent, "that anyone had come forward to help Stephen Purcell, the consequence must have been to improve his chances with Miss Somers."

"I don't feel certain," Elizabeth retorted, "that he ever really stood much chance. Oh, at first, perhaps, after her life with three hundred girls at school, when she must have found Lower Marling deadly dull, she may have been thankful enough to have him as a companion. She is keen about games—lawn-tennis, golf, and so forth, though she doesn't hunt. And Stephen—"

"Was fond of games, too!"

"Still, you understand," Elizabeth insisted, "that for months before he made up his mind to go abroad, they had seen very little of each other. Before he made up his mind definitely, I mean. He had talked about it for ever so long before he actually came up to the scratch and booked his state room."

"Then what," asked Bedison, "enabled him ultimately to stay in England?"

## CHAPTER XI

### PASCOE

"WELL, a strange thing happened," said Elizabeth. "One morning, only two days after Lady Redington received the telegram about Norman's death, there was a letter for Stephen on the breakfast table. It was from a man of whom he had never heard before . . . a Mr. Pascoe, who asked him to call at some address, near Holborn, I think, and he would hear of something to his advantage."

"Did he go?" asked Bedison.

"Without the least hesitation. This was within only a few days of his sailing for Sydney. Pascoe turned out to be a moneylender. He seemed to know all about Norman's death and the difference it made, and he offered to take over Stephen's debts, to compromise with his creditors, and actually to let him have money by instalments up to a thousand pounds, provided he stayed at home."

"Was the offer accepted?"

"Oh dear yes. Stephen had to insure his life and to sign some I.O.U.'s, but what I have never been able to understand is this. How had Pascoe heard about Norman's death? Because his letter must actually have been written the day after and of course his offer depended on the poor boy's no longer standing between Basil and his cousin. Pascoe said that it was part of a moneylender's business to find out things of that sort, and Stephen really didn't seem to care. He brought back fifty pounds in bank notes and that was enough. He forfeited his passage money and nothing more was said about going to Australia."

"Did the improvement in his position make any difference to Mrs. Somers and her daughter?" asked Bedison.

"Not to Mary. At least in a way, perhaps, it did. I fancy she was inclined to resent being made so cheap. I never liked Mrs. Somers and now she showed the kind of person she was. No one could have been more barefaced, and a woman with a mouth like hers could be horribly cruel if she liked. She had not allowed Stephen to enter her house--oh, for months. But a week after his journey to London, she invited him to dine.

I have seen her watching Basil as if she were reckoning up his chances in the most cold-blooded way."

During the last few minutes Bedison seemed to see Elizabeth Dunlop in a fresh phase. To tell the truth her own expression had become somewhat cruel while she was talking about Mrs. Somers, whom she obviously detested.

"Towards the end of last March," she continued, "Basil was taken ill while he was at Redington Court. We had two trained nurses, and Mrs. Somers sent to inquire after him twice a day. Dr. Gregory was afraid he would die, and when to everybody's surprise his patient turned the corner, he spoke plainly to Lady Redington and later on did his best, as Stephen says, to put the fear of God into Basil. Dr. Gregory insisted that unless he forswore sack, his days were numbered. Lady Redington even went as far as to tell the butler to keep the spirit decanter out of his way."

"For once," suggested Bedison, "the doctor's advice appears to have had some effect."

"Oh yes," cried Elizabeth, "Basil was much more careful, and then one day, towards the end of April, he astounded us all by announcing that he was going to be married."

"A disappointment for his cousin," suggested Bedison.

"How magnificently he bore it!" she answered, with a vastly different expression now, "I shall never forget that afternoon. We were all together in the drawing-room. No one would have imagined that the news might ruin his prospects. Before the rest of us could recover from our astonishment, Stephen stepped forward and wrung Basil's hand and wished him luck . . . you would have thought he had just heard he had come into a fortune instead of most likely lost one."

"What about Mrs. Somers?" asked Bedison.

"She behaved," said Elizabeth, with her forehead a mass of lines, and another subtle change in her voice, "just as I should have expected. But before she took any steps, another curious thing happened. Basil told us of his engagement on Tuesday afternoon. He had come from London expressly the same morning. The announcement did not appear in the newspapers till the following Friday, yet on Thursday Stephen had a telegram from Pascoe and went to London at once. The odious man threatened to make him a bankrupt, and though he had undertaken to advance a thousand pounds and Stephen had not received more than five hundred, no more was to be forthcoming."

"Then," suggested Bedison, "Mr. Purcell was actually very much in the same position as when he first heard of Pascoe."



It was true that his debts had been transferred to the money-lender, but he would find the same difficulty in carrying on in England."

"He was at his wits' end," said Elizabeth. "But this is what puzzles me. How in the world had Pascoe heard of Basil's engagement before it was announced in the newspapers?"

"It looks as if he had some underhanded source of information," answered the inspector.

"Yes, but who could it have been?"

"How about your servants?" said Bedison. "I suppose the engagement was known throughout the house. What of the butler?"

Elizabeth obviously resented the insinuation. She emphatically shook her head.

"Harvey! The last person in the world," she insisted. "He is far too faithful. He has lived at Redington Court more than thirty years. Besides, he has left the village only twice since I came more than two years ago. Once when his daughter Lucy ran away from home, and again when she was in hospital about six months later."

Bedison had not heard of Lucy Harvey before. He had understood that the butler had only one daughter, who lived with her mother at Corner Cottage, where he had gone to see Mr. Moulton. Elizabeth referred to her leaving home as if there had been trouble connected with her departure, the sequel to which was her illness at the hospital. But Bedison preferred to deal with one thing at a time. He could return to Lucy Harvey later.

"Would Mrs. Somers have been likely to have early information of Mr. Purcell's engagement?" he asked.

"Naturally the news was soon all over the village," said Elizabeth, "but you are not going to suggest that she was in communication with Pascoe!"

"You were going to tell me," returned Bedison, "what line Mrs. Somers took."

"She was brutal enough to say that now Basil was going to be married, he would take greater care of himself, that there was no reason why he should not have a son—"

"In fact," exclaimed Bedison, "she altered her tactics once more. What was her attitude after Mr. Basil Purcell's death?" he asked.

"Oh, of course, Stephen is always at The Grove."

"Then where does Mr. Moulton come in, Miss Dunlop?"

"I have really not the slightest doubt in the world that he will marry Mary Somers," Elizabeth insisted.

"In spite of her mother's opposition?"

"Mothers don't count for so much as they used to do," answered Elizabeth. "You have seen Mr. Moulton. Does he strike you as the sort of man who could be played fast and loose with? And the irony of it! The woman has been plotting and plotting and yet at the moment when she thought she had gained her end, when Basil's death seemed to make it perfectly safe to encourage Stephen for all she was worth, Mr. Moulton comes forward and upsets all her plans."

"One thing occurs to me if I may say so," said Bedison, with the shadow of a smile.

"What is that?"

"Stephen Purcell seems to have taken you fully into his confidence."

"We were always good—good pals," she answered, trying to stifle a sigh.

"Do you deal frankly with him? Do you warn him of the disappointment which you insist lies in store for him?"

"If I did he wouldn't believe me," she said. "So far he has had his own way in everything. Nine months ago he seemed to be in the depths. He was on the eve of leaving the country. Now he is Lord Redington's heir. He is like a man flushed by victory and unable to anticipate defeat. Of course he is terribly jealous of Mr. Moulton, but I don't believe for an instant he feels afraid of not getting his own way."

Now the inspector rose from his chair.

"I am afraid I have kept you a long time," he said, "but before I go I want to hear about Harvey's daughter—"

"About Ethel?" Elizabeth looked more surprised than she had done during the interview.

"About her sister—Lucy I think her name is. You hinted that she ran away from home—"

"That was two years ago or very nearly. What can she have had to do with Basil's death?"

"Anyhow," said Bedison, "I shall be much obliged if you will tell me why she went away."

## CHAPTER XII

### CONCERNING LUCY HARVEY

"I SUPPOSE," said Elizabeth, "you have seen Ethel Harvey?"

"I have noticed a pretty, fair-headed girl in the garden as I passed Corner Cottage," answered Bedison.

"Lucy might have been her twin, they are so much alike," Elizabeth explained, "though she must be more than a year older. A miserable, commonplace story, and if it had not been for me, there would have been none to tell. Two years and a half ago I was living in London—Sloane Square—and being down here for a few days I heard that Lucy Harvey had grown discontented with village life and wanted to go into service. As we were wanting a maid I engaged her, and it happened before she had been with us long that the brother of our cook came home on a visit from Alberta. Well, Lucy became engaged to the man—his name was Dowsett—and he was to send over the money for her passage as soon as he could scrape it together. To my disappointment she gave us a month's notice as soon as he had sailed, without any apparent reason, but the cook explained that her brother was jealous of the butler and had asked Lucy to go back to her own people till the time came to go out to him in Canada."

Elizabeth paused for a moment and then continued hastily.

"Shortly after she left us my father died and Lady Redington invited me here for a few weeks, though as a matter of fact I have stayed ever since. I saw a good deal of Lucy Harvey and she seemed perfectly happy. She showed me the things she was making for her outfit. Her disappearance couldn't possibly have been more astounding."

"How long was that after Dowsett's departure?" asked Bedison.

"Six months," was the answer. "Poor Harvey was in a dreadful state of mind. He doted on his two girls. You can't imagine a happier family."

"He had not objected to the engagement with Dowsett?" suggested Bedison.

"Not at all. It's true that he had never seen the man, but—no, he was quite satisfied and I had told him the family was

a decent one. It was just after Lucy's flight that he went to London and returned a week later a broken man. Six months or so afterwards he received the news that his daughter was in a hospital in Marylebone Road . . . dying. Harvey and his wife went to her at once, but though she lost her child, she herself got better."

"She didn't come home," said Bedison.

"Nothing would induce her to do that. Nothing they could say had the least effect. She couldn't bring herself to face all the people she had known since she was a small girl."

"Can you," asked the inspector, "give me her present address?"

"I haven't the slightest notion where she is living. I had a long talk with Harvey after his return from his second visit to London, but he seemed so broken-hearted that it seemed kinder to leave him to himself in future. He couldn't forgive her for refusing to come back."

"And Dowsett," said Bedison. "What about him?"

"Goodness knows, poor man! I imagine Lucy wrote. A horrible task, but she must have made a sort of confession to account for her not going out to him. Now," cried Eliazbeth, "I think I have told you all I know."

"Not all your—your speculations, Miss Dunlop."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Has it never occurred to you that the father of Lucy Harvey's child, that was born twelve months after Dowsett's departure might have been—"

"Basil!" she cried.

"You have never had any suspicion of that!"

"Good gracious, no," she retorted. "Nor can anyone else have thought of such a thing. And it would have been difficult to keep such a secret in a village like Lower Marling."

"Still the secret *was* kept about somebody," urged Bedison. "While the girl was making her outfit for Canada, and looking, as you say, perfectly happy, she was obviously carrying on an intrigue so clandestinely that nothing of the kind was suspected. One would naturally look for a man in this neighbourhood, for a man who hadn't the best of reputations."

"I can assure you," said Elizabeth, "that Basil had enough sins of his own to answer for without being accused of those he didn't commit. After all it is the merest speculation on your part."

"Well," returned the inspector, "it is my duty to speculate, you know, Miss Dunlop."

"It seems so utterly unnecessary," she murmured. "The case seems so clear."

"In your opinion," Bedison suggested, "I suppose, Mr. Purcell took his own life."

"You ignore the obvious and go out of your way to look for the improbable," she insisted. "For my part, I don't understand Miss Cathcart. Why didn't she come to the funeral? Why has she taken no notice since she answered Lady Redington's letter? If I had been in her place, I should have been hungry for every detail. I should have wanted to see the place where Basil spent so much of his time. How do we know there had not been a quarrel? But," Elizabeth added, "I daresay you have learnt a great deal more than you choose to say."

With a rather enigmatic smile he took the hand which she offered in her friendly way, and made his way back to Carborough, but on reaching the police station, heard that the chief constable had left for the day. Bedison had nothing to do for the rest of the evening but think over his plans, and in the first place he intended to see Mrs. Somers.

Mr. Pascoe also, whom there would be little difficulty in tracing. It was impossible not to suspect some connection between Mary's mother and the moneylender, perplexing as it appeared. Pascoe must have had some means of obtaining information about Stephen Purcell, and Mrs. Somers seemed less unlikely than anyone else.

If the inspector went to see Pascoe first, Mrs. Somers would no doubt be warned, whereas he preferred to talk to her before she suspected his opinion. He reached the white house with the two gables at half-past ten on Friday morning. On one side of it was a conservatory, on the other a more recently built garage, and an elderly man was weeding the front garden. The parlourmaid could not say when Mrs. Somers would be at home, though Miss Somers was expected back shortly. She had gone as far as Carborough with her mother in the car, intending to do some shopping before the day grew too hot, and to take the motor bus home.

When she actually returned at half-past eleven she was not much surprised, and not in the least alarmed, to hear of the detective's call, because Digby Moulton, who of course, was in touch with the chief constable, had explained that Inspector Bedison was prowling about the neighbourhood, with the object of picking up any unconsidered trifle of information.

"There's a chiel among us taking notes," Digby had said with a laugh, "so we shall have to be careful. A ghoulish sort of occupation, turning skeletons out of cupboards."



Mary Somers had, however, things personally much more serious to occupy her mind. There had long been something not perfectly candid and straightforward about her mother. At St. Kilda's Mary had never been in a position to talk freely about her father of whom her recollection was pleasant without being affectionate. He had died six years ago when she was fifteen, at St. John's Wood . . . a tall, stoutly-built, fair-haired man, loud-voiced and good-tempered, and connected with some unknown sort of business, which, however, must have been successful as he always had money and liked to fling it about.

Mrs. Somers kept her at school after she should have left, and then took her to Lower Marling, where at first she was bored almost to death, till Stephen Purcell made things livelier.

Unlike Christine Cathcart, who had been prepared to make any sacrifice for a title and large estate, Mary Somers cared for none of these things, while she was disgusted at the meanness of repelling Stephen when he was poor and encouraging him (as she was expected to do) now he promised to be rich.

If Digby Moulton had not come to Hill Crest for a week-end in June Mary might conceivably have given way to her mother's importunity, but she quite understood why he had taken Mrs. Harvey's rooms at Corner Cottage, and had no scruple about meeting him at the vicarage tennis court every time Mrs. Somers went away for the day. They had spent three halcyon weeks before Lady Redington's garden party, where several pairs of eyes were opened.

From that time Mary had little peace, with Stephen haunting the house on the one hand, with her mother constantly harping on one discordant string, with Digby difficult to prevent from coming to the point.

She had not the slightest fear of being forced into a distasteful marriage. That would be an anachronism. You may lead a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink! What she dreaded was immediate unpleasantness rather than ultimate disaster.

## CHAPTER XIII

### STEPHEN PURCELL PROPOSES

MARY SOMERS had not been at home very long that Friday morning and was still in her own room, when Susan, the parlourmaid, tapped at her door.

"Mr. Purcell is downstairs," she said.

The sitting-room windows were open and the garden was fragrant with roses, while Stephen was standing on the hearth-rug, tall, handsome, debonair, looking like a man who intended to carry all before him.

"What a glorious morning," cried Mary.

"The best of my life, I hope," he answered, "of yours too, Mary. I've been having a long jaw with the old man since breakfast and upon my word he has come down pretty handsomely. I'm to have double the allowance he made poor old Basil."

"Congrats, Stephen," she said, though she was beginning to feel afraid of what might be coming.

"Still," he continued, "there was a . . . well, not exactly a condition, but I was told pretty plainly what was expected of me."

"Nothing very . . . very dreadful?" she murmured.

"You see, Mary, the old chap is tremendously keen on my being married before he departs this life."

"Lord Redington isn't worse," she suggested.

"It's no good trying to deceive ourselves," Stephen continued. "In the ordinary course of nature he can't have a great deal longer to live. Whether he's to be gratified or not depends on you. No one else really has a voice in it. Mary, darling, I want you to let me tell him you've promised to be my wife."

Mary slowly shook her head.

"I'm sorry, Stephen," she answered.

"Don't say that," he entreated. "I want you to be glad. Mary, I'm not trying to bribe you—"

"You couldn't," she cried. "I am absolutely incorruptible."

"Still dear, you must let me say this. I could make you a thousand times happier than you have ever been yet. By and by, you know, my aunt will clear out, and Elizabeth, of course;

you will be monarch of all you survey and as long as I live you will have me for your slave."

She assured him there was nothing she desired less, but he stayed an hour, making the same petition in varying forms, though there was a monotony in her answers.

"Well," he insisted at last, "you've dealt me the hardest blow I have ever had."

"But, surely, you must have known," she retorted. "I have done my best to show you—"

"Ah, but there are things one can't grasp," he said. "One must have a modicum of hope to carry on with. And, Mary dear, I haven't given up yet. I've got everything in the world I want, but the one most important thing. I give you fair warning. I mean to have you before I've done."

After he had at last gone, Mary began to dread her mother's return. She longed for three o'clock, when she expected to meet Digby. Not that he must hear a word about her morning's experience!

As a matter of fact it was quite unnecessary to tell him. In the middle of his work he had gone, as he often went, to the green wooden gate for a whiff of fresh air, and, looking naturally towards The Grove, had seen Stephen's two-seater stop outside the house. This upset his mind, preventing him from concentrating on Lord Finborough's Life and Letters again to any useful purpose, so that an hour later he strolled to the gate once more, when the chocolate-coloured car was still in the same position.

Although he put on his flannels and took his racquet to the vicarage garden he suggested that the afternoon was too hot for exercise, and led Mary into the oppressive shade of the pine wood.

"You had a rather long visit from Purcell this morning," said Digby.

"Oh, dear! I couldn't get rid of him," she murmured.

"Look here, Mary," Digby continued, "you have always done your level best to put me off whenever I've tried to bring you to the scratch, but to-day I'm simply going ahead."

Coming to a standstill in the depths of the wood, he planted his hands on her shoulders.

"Will you marry me?" he said.

She did not, it is true, say she would, but she raised her grey, tell-tale eyes, and found herself in his arms.

"What," he asked half an hour later, "will be the most convenient time to see Mrs. Somers this evening?"

"Oh, you mustn't . . . you mustn't," she faltered, brought regretfully down to earth again.

"My dear girl, quite obviously I must."

"Not—not to-day, Digby, please!"

"Why not?" he demanded, and after a few moments' hesitation she came to the conclusion that the wisest plan would be to deal with him frankly, as she always intended to do as long as she lived. Shyly she told him what had taken place a few hours ago.

"I feel I oughtn't to give Stephen away," she added, "but mother will be furious when she hears what I have done."

"Don't tell her," Digby insisted. "Let the greater include the less. Say nothing till I come this evening."

"He will tell her if I don't," said Mary. "That is the worst of it. I feel certain there has been a sort of conspiracy between them, and since Basil's death the situation has become ever so much more acute. You will have to let me have my own way, Digby. It must be a secret between us."

"For how long, in Heaven's name?"

She looked doubtful at that.

"It isn't that I want to keep you waiting," she continued, "and I know nothing in the world can ever part us now, unless you—you should change your mind."

"Never as long as I live," he protested, and she unequivocally believed him. She knew that he was as incapable of changing as she was herself.

"What I want," she explained, "is to let the effect of—of Stephen's refusal blow over. There is bound at the best to be a great deal of unpleasantness, but nothing compared with what it would be if mother imagined I was going to marry you. Of course," Mary added, "I ought not to have committed myself. I ought to have waited."

With the most intense reluctance Digby gave way in the end, and then she insisted on going home. Her mother had hinted at returning earlier than usual, and her reason was easy to guess. Having known of Stephen's intention she felt impatient to learn the result.

Leaving the wood, they walked to the gate without approaching the vicarage, and on reaching the road Mary saw a man coming from the direction of The Grove whom she had never seen before. When Digby told her it was Inspector Bedison, who in fact had tried his luck again after attending the adjourned inquest, she suggested that they should stop, whereupon Digby introduced her.

"Do you want to see my mother?" asked Mary.

"I have drawn blank for the second time to-day," answered Bedison.

"She is not likely to be long if you would care to come in and wait," she suggested, and the invitation being promptly accepted, she walked on to the house with the inspector, while Digby went in the opposite direction to Corner Cottage.



## CHAPTER XIV

MRS. SOMERS

MARY took Inspector Bedison to the sitting-room where, standing by the open window, he expressed his admiration for the roses, so that she led the way into the garden, calling his attention to her favourites.

"Mrs. Somers," he suggested, "is keen on motoring."

"She has been ever since we came here," said Mary. "She drives a great deal too fast. You see, she suffers from sleeplessness, and Dr. Gregory advised her to spend as many hours as possible in the open air."

This was the only explanation, she had ever received of her mother's long drives, which she was never invited to share.

"A terrible infliction . . . sleeplessness," answered Bedison in his most sympathetic tone. "What does Mrs. Somers take for it?"

"Oh, she has some tabloids that Dr. Gregory prescribed. I am always afraid that she should take too many. They're the tiniest things."

When they had walked along by the roses, Mary went indoors again, inviting Bedison to sit down.

"By the by, Miss Somers," he said, "it was your purse that was stolen at Lady Redington's garden party."

"Yes," she returned, "I left my handbag on the table while I went to speak to Lord Redington—"

"When did you discover the loss?" asked Bedison.

"After breakfast the next morning."

"You have no doubt, I suppose, that you put it in the bag before you went to Redington Court?"

"Not the least. I always keep it there, and I saw it when I put in a clean handkerchief just before I left home."

"But where was the bag between your return on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning?"

"In my own room . . . on the dressing-table."

"You left it there, for instance, while you were downstairs at breakfast. So that it's possible one of your servants—"

"No," Mary insisted, "that is entirely out of the question." As she was speaking a hooter was heard, and she rose from her

chair. "That is my mother," she cried. "I will tell her you are here."

He opened the door, and as she passed out of the room could not help admiring her tall, supple figure, coming to the conclusion that she was by no means the least attractive of the three women with whom he had been brought into contact since his arrival at Carborough the previous Sunday night.

He scarcely knew whether her shingled hair ought to be described as dark or fair . . . dark, perhaps, nor did it look the worse in his opinion because it was slightly rumpled. Her eyes were set rather wide apart under straight black eye-brows, and as far as he could tell she was entirely free from make up. Although she could not be more than a few years younger than Elizabeth Dunlop, it struck Inspector Bedison that the one should be classed as a girl, the other as a woman.

After only a short absence Mary returned with Mrs. Somers, who wore a long dark blue coat and a tightly fitting hat. She must have married unusually young to have a daughter of Mary's age, and was herself of a more slender build, also an inch or two shorter. She had black hair, and there were dark patches beneath her tired-looking eyes as she entered the room, with her head thrown slightly back, as if to see him better through her rimless glasses. Not the type of woman, Bedison thought, to spend her days driving aimlessly about the country unless indeed speed gave her pleasure. There was an unusual keenness in her thin face, and she seemed to regard him not exactly with antagonism, but rather with impatience, as if she had no time to spare at the moment.

He began with his customary preamble. He was making a point of interrogating everybody who had come into contact with Mr. Purcell on the afternoon of his death.

"But," she impatiently interrupted, "I had really nothing to do with him. We didn't exchange a single word."

"Still, I believe," said Bedison, "you happened to be talking to the vicar after the others had moved away. I wondered whether you actually saw the waiter put the whisky and water on the table."

"I might not have noticed," she answered, "even if I had still been near, and of course nobody can feel a doubt about the man. He was obviously a thief. Who else could have stolen the purse from my daughter's handbag?"

"That," said Bedison, "wouldn't make us any less anxious to find him, and thief or not he may prove the most important factor in the case. Granting that he stole the purse, he must have hung about till the coast was clear. Most likely he was

hiding in the marquee and from there he may have seen the person who tampered with Mr. Purcell's drink, as we know somebody must have done."

"Unless it was a case of suicide," Mrs. Somers suggested.

"Even so, the waiter may have spotted him putting the poison in the tumbler," said Bedison, and Mary, standing by the window which opened on to the garden, had the fancy that those two, her mother and the detective, were pitted against each other. In his tone there seemed to be something resembling a threat, while she assumed an air of bravado.

"Then," she exclaimed, "find the missing waiter, and the problem is solved! "

"We are certain to find him sooner or later," was the answer.

He spoke as if he believed she had reason to regret the man's arrest, and Mary had the impression that a little more would bring about an open quarrel, yet she was dreading the inspector's departure, knowing what her mother's first words would be after the door closed upon him.

"Did Stephen come this morning?" Mrs. Somers asked, without losing a moment.

"Soon after I returned from Carborough," answered Mary.

"Well? Have you nothing to tell me?"

"He—he asked me to marry him, mother."

Advancing suddenly, she seized Mrs. Somers' arm, longing for sympathy.

"I couldn't," Mary continued. "I couldn't possibly."

"Do you mean that you refused him . . . after all I've done for months and months, planning for your good. You actually refused him?"

"I was bound to—"

"You damned little fool!" Mrs. Somers retorted.

## CHAPTER XV

### DR. GREGORY AGAIN

ON reaching the "Swan" Bedison had a hurried meal, and set forth to the railway station, not troubling to take a suitcase, as he intended to sleep at Gloucester Road that Friday night. On his way there, however, he called at Scotland Yard, where he had no difficulty in learning the address of Messrs. Pascoe and Co., Financial agents, 8 Bude Street, W.C.1.

Shortly after ten o'clock on Saturday morning, he was talking to his old acquaintance, Divisional-Inspector Wilder, at the Holborn police station, who told him the business was managed by Mr. Joseph Franks, and had been established several years.

"What sort of man is he?" asked Bedison.

"About forty, dresses up to the nines," was the answer. "Marcelled hair, white spats, a ring on each hand . . . that sort of thing. A year or so ago some poor devil whom I suppose he had been fleecing went to the office, managed to get past the girls, and threatened him with a razor. We were 'phoned for but Franks refused to make a charge. I don't know whether you'll catch him on a Saturday."

The offices were on the first floor, those below being occupied by a firm of solicitors. Bedison found himself separated by a narrow counter from the greater portion of a good-sized, well-lighted room, where the staff consisted in four short-haired, well-dressed, competent-looking young women, one being busy at a dictaphone, the others at ordinary typewriters.

"Mr. Franks?" said Bedison, as the tallest came forward.

She appeared uncertain whether Mr. Franks was at home or not, till hearing the visitor's name, she offered to go to inquire. A few minutes later Bedison was entering a door marked "private" to find Mr. Franks sitting at a large writing-table, behind which was another door leading, no doubt, to an inner room. A good-looking man in his effeminate way, smoking a cigarette in one of the longest of tubes.

"Good afternoon, inspector," he said, nodding without rising. "What can I do for you?"

"You can give me a little information about one of your clients . . . Mr. Stephen Purcell."

"With all the pleasure in life. 'Take a pew.'" He took his cigarette from his lips, pointing to a chair on the other side of the table with it. "What about him?" he added.

"You have been putting a good deal of pressure on him—"

"Ancient history, inspector. Why rake up the painful past? I daresay you know that Mr. Purcell's stock has gone up in the market."

"I know," retorted Bedison, "that from first to last you have been closely in touch with his affairs."

"What do *you* think?"

"You approached him to begin with a very few hours after the death of his nephew," suggested Bedison.

Mr. Franks smiled not unpleasantly, gesticulating with his ivory cigarette tube as if to lend force to his words.

"Our business," he exclaimed, "is to be interested in anybody not a minor, who is likely to want money and is prepared to pay for it. Not half my energy is employed in this old office. I make a point of going about a bit, you see, and Stephen Purcell was pretty well known in certain circles . . . so was his cousin who did himself in the other week."

"And," Bedison persisted, "after the boy's death, counting on what you believed to be the fact that Basil Purcell's was a bad life, you offered to finance Stephen."

"Quite. Why the devil shouldn't we?" demanded Franks, with perfect good humour.

"Then," Bedison continued, "when you learnt that Basil was going to be married, you began to use threats."

"Why, naturally! I don't come here for a picnic. Of course in our line we're bound to take risks, but I don't mind admitting I made a bloomer for once in a way. I thought I had sized up Basil Purcell pretty accurately. I didn't dream he would marry. As soon as I heard he was going to, it was up to me to save what I could out of the fire."

"There's one thing I don't understand, Mr. Franks."

"What's that? Don't stand on ceremony. Don't mind asking," cried Mr. Franks, leaning back comfortably and crossing his patent-leather shoes under the table.

"How did you hear of Basil Purcell's engagement?" asked Bedison.

"I saw the announcement in the *Morning Post*."

"But if you remember you wired to Stephen Purcell before the appearance of the announcement," said Bedison.

"Not a bit, inspector. You've mixed up the dates. If I hadn't spotted it in the paper, how could I have known?"



"That's what I want you to tell me. It's clear you were in communication with someone at Lower Marling. It's important that I should know who your informant was, in connection with my inquiries into the circumstances of Basil Purcell's death. The inquest has been adjourned till next Friday. Unless you tell me what I want to know, I shall have to subpoena you—"

Sitting more upright, Mr. Franks looked at the open diary by his blotting pad.

"Next Friday! I'll make a note of it," he answered. "About what time do you think?"

"Two o'clock," said Bedison, but though he showed no sign of irritation, he left the office realizing that he had got no change out of Mr. Franks. By dinner time he was back at Carborough and, before sitting down to dine in the commercial room at the "Swan," he rang up Dr. Gregory, making an appointment for nine o'clock the same evening, when he was taken again to the consulting-room, where the doctor came looking as if he had enjoyed his meal and, perhaps a glass of port after it. As there were not likely to be any more patients, he offered the inspector a cigarette and lighted one himself.

"Well, now, what can I do for you this time?" he asked.

"Will you tell me whether Mr. Stephen Purcell is one of your patients?" said Bedison.

"The only person at Redington Court who has never consulted me, inspector. I see what you're driving at, but I can swear he has never been inside my surgery."

"Nor in your house?"

"I can't say that. He has been at my wife's tennis parties from time to time. Of course," said Dr. Gregory, with a broad smile on his cherubic face, which was slightly flushed this evening, "you're thinking of the garden door. But Stephen Purcell has not been on these premises since Christmas. Try again, Inspector!"

"What about Harvey?"

"Lord Redington's butler!"

"Has he ever consulted you?" suggested Bedison.

"Oh dear yes. He was never a strong man, and the war seemed to put a score of years on to his life. You may have noticed that he never straightens his arm . . . the left, fortunately. He suffers from neuritis."

"When was he here last, doctor?"

Dr. Gregory seemed to be reflecting.

"Last week," he said. "I forget the exact day."

"Ah yes, but before the garden party," urged Bedison.

"I know I saw him shortly before. I had better look at my book."

There were one or two books standing on end on a shelf behind his chair, and turning he took down the longest and narrowest, opening it and passing his forefinger slowly down the page.

"Harvey," he said, "was here on Monday the 13th."

"Two days before—"

"Yes, I recollect now! He complained of a good deal of pain, was afraid of knocking up before the 15th. An important day in his calendar, you know, inspector."

"Was he alone in this room?" asked Bedison.

"Goodness knows! Most likely. He is generally off duty in the afternoon, and if he wants to see me comes before he goes back to Redington Court. I fancy I found him waiting when I returned from my round." Dr. Gregory looked across the table, meeting Bedison's eyes with a whimsical expression. "You have hit on a rather unlikely subject this time!" he added.

"You may think Mrs. Somers even more so," said Bedison.

"If possible, yes, I do."

"I needn't ask whether she's one of your patients. I happen to know you have been treating her for some time for insomnia—"

"Now," cried Dr. Gregory, "how the dickens did you discover that? Anyhow," he continued with a sudden frown, "you must know also that there's such a thing as professional etiquette."

"I was not going to ask the nature of your treatment," said Bedison with a smile. "I don't doubt that she has taken drugs for some time. You won't mind telling me whether she comes to you or you go to her."

Dr. Gregory's face resumed its customarily good-humoured expression.

"Mrs. Somers," he answered, "is as shrewd as they're made. She has the true business instinct. The first time she sent for me, she inquired my fee, and when I told her, suggested that I ought to make it less if she came to my house. Bless the woman, I let her have her own way, and so to save half a crown she comes here whenever she finds she can't rub along without me. No," Dr. Gregory continued, "I may as well anticipate the inevitable question." He turned over a few pages of the book, and again ran his finger down it. "She was here on Saturday the 11th, but whether she was left alone in this room or not is more than I can say."

"You don't make up her medicine," suggested Bedison. "You give her a prescription and no doubt you mark it, 'not to be repeated.'"

"Ah," cried the doctor, "you know too much, inspector."

Bedison knew at least that he was in the habit of prescribing for Mrs. Somers a drug to which she might become an "addict," and that no chemist would supply it without a doctor's prescription.

"Well," said Gregory, "is that all? Or is there anyone else on your list?"

"Only one."

"Who is that?"

"Miss Dunlop—"

Leaning back in his chair, Dr. Gregory broke into boisterous laughter. It was so long before he ceased that Bedison rose to give him a hint.

"Sorry, inspector!" he exclaimed. "Miss Dunlop has required my services only once—last summer when she had a nasty wasp sting. She is never ill. Never has even a headache; still I am going to tell you something and you can make the most of it. If I don't you'll be certain to find out. You must know that I have two boys and two girls and they are all devoted to Elizabeth Dunlop. She is in and out here sometimes two or three times a week. She isn't above a romp in the garden and what could be easier than to slip into the surgery . . . playing hide-and-seek, for instance. But, as a matter of fact, we all know that there's not a great deal of difficulty in obtaining cardocine . . . not nearly enough. The Cumberland case proved that. There's really no earthly reason to assume that it was taken from my surgery, though I admit it's not an impossibility."

"No," answered Bedison, "I don't think it is."

## CHAPTER XVI

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR SERGEANT CLOWES

ON Sunday morning Inspector Bedison left the Swan Hotel while the chimes of the abbey were still pealing; he walked past the shuttered shops, and saw a good many people on their way to hear the venerable archdeacon preach.

From Inspector Rolfe Bedison learnt that in the ordinary course the chief constable seldom turned up at the police station on Sunday, but he had left orders that he was to be rung up at Hill Crest if the inspector wished to see him, when he would run over in his car at once.

At half-past twelve, accordingly, Major Radford was seated in his office in the market place, listening attentively to the account of the detective's experiences, to the details of his interview with Miss Dunlop in the first place, then to a description of his visit to The Grove, and subsequently to Number 8 Bude Street, Red Lion Square.

"I haven't much doubt," Bedison added, "that there's a fairly intimate connection between Mrs. Somers and the loan shop."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the chief constable, "I hope not." He was thinking of Digby Moulton.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Bedison, "to find that it was she who practically supplied the money that enabled Stephen Purcell to stay in England after the boy's death. Consequently she would have had a considerable interest in Basil Purcell's removal."

"You've no proof, inspector. Not a scrap that I can see."

"She has been taking drugs for some time," Bedison persisted. "She was in Dr. Gregory's consulting-room within a week of the garden party—"

"You seem," retorted the chief constable, "to suspect all his patients in turn."

"I won't go so far as that, sir. But remember! We have a crime without the slightest clue. My plan is to take each of a certain group of people in turn, as I told you, and see what is to be discovered about them. For instance, I feel certain that Mrs. Somers is running the business in Bude Street. I know that Miss Dunlop has a grand passion for Stephen—"

"You don't suggest that he cares a damn for her, inspector."

"No," Bedison admitted.

"Then how can she have stood to profit by Basil's death? Tell me that," cried the chief constable.

"The situation was this," said Bedison. "At the time the boy Norman died Stephen was on the point of going to Sydney. If he had been enabled to stay in England then, what would have been the result? He would have been free to continue his attentions to Miss Somers. If it had been possible for Miss Dunlop to let him have some of her own money, she would have shrunk from doing so because she would have been playing into her rival's hands. Well," Bedison explained, "when Basil announced his engagement and Pascoe cut off supplies Stephen was once more on his beam ends, but presently a revolution took place. Moulton appeared on the scene. Miss Dunlop, rightly or wrongly, was convinced that he had cut Stephen Purcell out. It had become possible to help him without improving his chance with Miss Somers—"

"Good God, inspector! To help Stephen by poisoning Basil!"

"It has to be admitted," said Bedison, "that the position of the one was enormously improved by the death of the other. In fact, if Basil hadn't died there was every reason to expect that Stephen would be driven to go abroad, whereas his remaining in England might now give Miss Dunlop her opportunity."

"The most improbable suggestion I've ever heard, inspector."

"I admit that, sir. But we're out to discover something improbable. No one appears *likely* to have committed the murder, but granting that Purcell didn't take his own life, someone else certainly did. And someone who carefully chose that curious setting for the crime, someone who thought that he or she was free from suspicion."

"Then," said the chief constable, "in your opinion it lies between Mrs. Somers and Miss Dunlop."

"Not necessarily," answered Bedison. "Those are two that I have investigated so far. Say they are both cases for further inquiry. But there's another—"

"Who, in Heaven's name?"

"Of course you know all about Lucy Harvey. Assume that Basil Purcell was the cause of her leaving home."

"A tremendous assumption," retorted the chief constable. "And again you haven't an atom of proof."

"That's true," Bedison agreed. "But you have a pretty girl who is looking forward to going out to be married in Canada. She thinks herself safe and is fond of admiration. Then there's



Purcell idling about the village . . . a man of the worst reputation."

"They would have been bound to be spotted, inspector."

"He was too experienced. Grant my theory merely for the sake of the argument. Lucy had to make a confession to Dowsett, who was doing all he knew to save the money for her passage. There you have an enemy for Basil Purcell."

"There's safety in distance," exclaimed Major Radford. "He was some thousand miles away, you know."

"Yes, but what if he came to England later on . . . during the earlier part of July, for instance, and discovered the name of Lucy's seducer—"

"You're not suggesting that this man Dowsett was the waiter!" said the chief constable. "I thought we had made up our minds the blighter was a thief."

"How do we know?" demanded Bedison.

"It looks as if he stole Miss Somers' purse."

"We can't tell that it was stolen at the garden party. The handbag was left on her dressing-table at The Grove from her return till she opened it after breakfast on Thursday morning. Mrs. Somers may have taken out the purse."

"Why should she?" suggested Major Radford, passing his hand over his forehead.

"I am trying to canvass every possibility," said the inspector. "If the purse was stolen at the garden party, we may assume the waiter was the thief and had no concern with the murder. He may prove the most valuable witness. On the other hand it's conceivable that he was somebody known to Miss Somers, who is anxious to shield him, and took the purse to cross the scent. Then again, Dowsett, out for revenge on Purcell, may have disguised himself as a waiter to make certain of it."

Leaning back in his swivel chair the chief constable drew a deep breath.

"Then as I begin to understand," he said, "you are actually keeping an open mind, but meanwhile you follow up these separate threads in the hope that one of them may lead you somewhere."

"Exactly," answered Bedison. "And now," he added, "I want you to let me have Sergeant Clowes—"

"Inspector Rolfe, if you like," said Major Radford.

"Clowes, I think, sir. For one thing I must get Lucy Harvey's address; for another Mrs. Somers must be shadowed. I fancy we shall find she goes to Bude Street two or three times a week."

"Well, if she does that's enough for me," answered the chief constable. "I could believe any mortal thing of her. If the woman's running a loan shop she's capable of anything. But I hope to goodness she isn't. I hope you're wrong, inspector. I told you that Moulton's people were old friends of mine. The last man in the world to lose his head over a woman . . . that's what I should have said, but you never can tell. If you're right, Mary Somers would handicap his career. He would drop her as if she were a hot coal."

During the Sunday afternoon Bedison rang Sergeant Clowes up at the police station and asked him to dine at the "Swan" at a quarter to eight, and leaving business alone till the meal in the commercial room was finished, took him then to a quiet corner of the billiard room, where there was no danger from eavesdroppers this evening.

"I see you have a motor-bike," said Bedison. "What about its pace?"

Clowes, who had owned it only three months, waxed eloquent in its praise.

"And there's a side car," added Bedison.

"You see, inspector, the wife likes a spin now and then," said the sergeant, Mrs. Clowes being almost as great a novelty as the bicycle.

"I want to know," Bedison explained, "where Mrs. Somers goes three or four times a week on her own. I notice she generally passes here——"

"I've spotted her on the London Road," answered Clowes.

"If you were waiting in the yard below," said the inspector, "you could give a few minutes' start and follow her. Does she know you by sight?"

"I'd take precious good care she didn't recognise me, anyhow," cried the sergeant. "Goggles and so on. Trust me for that."

"If she goes to London, she will very likely leave her car at a garage . . . probably not far from Holborn. That's where your side car will come in. You must take one of your men so that you can nip off and follow her on foot."

"What about the wife!" suggested Clowes. "As if we were just off for a joy ride. She could look after the bike, while I look after Mrs. Somers."

"That ought to do," said Bedison. "Have a try to-morrow morning and report to me here as soon as you have any luck. Then there's another thing. Who's in charge of the post office at Lower Marling?"

"Mrs. Fussell keeps the shop," was the answer, "and her niece from London looks after the letters and things at the back counter."

"Do you know the girl?"

"Miss Fussell isn't a chicken, inspector. We just pass the time o' day, so to speak."

"I want," said Bedison, "the address of anyone Mrs. Harvey writes to. Mrs. Harvey or her daughter. The butler's letters would go in the bag from Redington Court. But his wife most likely drops hers into the box outside the shop."

"The question is," suggested the sergeant, "whether Miss Fussell knows her hand. You're not," he added, "supposing the Harveys had anything to do with the affair at the garden party!"

"I'm taking a leap in the dark," said Bedison. "It's up to you to get me what I want."

"I'll do my best, inspector. Take your oath of that," returned Clowes.

"Well, don't open Miss Fussell's eyes too wide. Say it's government business. It's quite on the cards that Mrs. Harvey may buy a stamp every time she posts a letter. In that case it oughtn't to be too difficult to spot her writing and pick the envelope from the rest afterwards. Understand, I don't want to see it, but you must manage to get me the address somehow."

Sergeant Clowes felt gratified by his commissions, and before he went to bed that Sunday night overhauled his bicycle and filled the tank in preparation for a drive to London and back. He did his best to show as little of his face as possible when he set out with Mrs. Clowes in the side car on Monday morning, and stopping at the "Swan," stood in the yard watching for Mrs. Somers, who as a matter of fact drove past the hotel shortly after half-past nine.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MRS. SOMERS EXPLAINS

MARY SOMERS had often found the state of affairs at home uncomfortable during the past twelve months, but never so unhappy as during the last few days. Friday had seemed to mark a dividing line between her mother and herself.

"You damned little fool!" She had never been spoken to quite in that way before, and the words still rankled. Her mother had never looked at her so venomously, while it was evident that Stephen did not intend to take "no" for a final answer. He had come to the house on Saturday and Sunday as if nothing unusual had happened, and, on the first occasion, held a long conversation with Mrs. Somers to begin with.

On the other hand, Mary had found no opportunity to speak to Digby Moulton, her mother having left the car in the garage and kept her daughter under strict observation. Although Mary might have protested that it was impossible for absence or anything else to make her heart grow fonder, she told herself that Digby was the only person in the world upon whom she could depend, and once or twice had even felt tempted to allow him to have his own way, announce their engagement, and take the risk.

She looked forward to Monday hoping that her mother would start for her unknown destination after breakfast as usual, and on entering the dining-room found on her plate a letter from her friend, Catherine Holden.

Catherine was the daughter of one of the Under-Secretaries of State and had spent a fortnight at The Grove shortly before Christmas. The question of a return visit from Mary had arisen several weeks ago, but there had been some doubt about Mr. Holden's movements. Now, however, Catherine wrote to say that her father would be detained in London for another month. Would Mary take pity on her and come next Friday?

Mrs. Somers entering, as Mary rejoiced to see, in her motor-ing hat, demanded rather sharply whom her letter was from, and at once insisted that the invitation must be accepted.

"Oh, but I haven't the least wish to go away at present," said Mary.

"Why not?" exclaimed her mother.

"It's the pleasantest month here," Mary insisted. "Far pleasanter than it would be in Phillimore Gardens."

"If you imagine," said Mrs. Somers, "that being here means meeting Mr. Moulton, as I hear you have been doing behind my back during the last month, you make a great mistake. You have been deceiving me all this time, but I am going to put an end to that sort of thing very quickly. I shall speak to Mrs. Winter and the vicar, and tell them plainly I object to your using their garden as you've been doing. Perhaps the best thing will be to go to town for a week or two, and you will kindly write to Catherine at once. A change of air may bring you to your senses."

A good deal more was said before Mary had the satisfaction of seeing Mrs. Somers set out, and then she could only look forward to the afternoon. She must meet Digby at three o'clock, even if it were her last visit to the tennis court. Naturally he began to protest that he objected to be left stranded at Lower Marling without her.

"But," she answered, "even if I refuse Catherine's invitation, things won't be much better. Mother has put her foot down. If she carries out her threat to speak to Mrs. Winter I can't possibly come here again."

"You're neither a child nor a slave," said Digby. "Why on earth should you be packed off to London against your wish? And after all what does Mrs. Somers stand to gain? Why is she bent on your going?"

"So that I shall be separated from you."

"But, dearest, it's sheer nonsense. Nothing in this world can separate us. Besides, she would be defeating her own purpose. She would be separating you from Purcell into the bargain."

"I fancy," said Mary, "she is just marking time. She doesn't know exactly what to do with me. Only one thing is certain. I shan't be allowed to come here as I have been doing. And I feel so weary of things at home. I think I shall have to go, Digby."

"When?" he asked.

"Catherine suggested Friday——"

"Well, don't be surprised if I turn up at Phillimore Gardens before many days," he answered, and the possibility went some way towards comforting her.

When Mrs. Somers returned at seven o'clock that evening she looked even more ill-humoured than when she had set forth, nor did her expression change when she heard that the letter



accepting Catherine's invitation had already been posted. They sat down to dinner at eight as usual, but Mrs. Somers had no appetite. Mary could not help thinking that her mother had something on her mind entirely apart from a disappointing daughter. Lighting a cigarette at the table she went to the sitting-room and took up the evening paper which she had brought back with her. The clock was striking nine when the door opened and Susan, the parlourmaid, announced:

"Inspector Bedison."

Sergeant Clowes, after a successful expedition, had seen him at the "Swan" an hour or two earlier, explaining that he had followed Mrs. Somers to London, where she left her car in a garage near Holborn. Thence he had shadowed her to Bude Street, where she had entered the office on the first floor. Without waiting to see her come out, Sergeant Clowes had given his wife something to eat, and made the best of his way back to Carborough.

Hence Inspector Bedison's determination to see Mrs. Somers this evening. Already she must have heard of his interview with Mr. Franks on Saturday morning, and know that at least a portion of her closely guarded secret was discovered.

"Where is Inspector Bedison?" asked Mrs. Somers.

"I left him in the hall——"

"Bring the man here!" said Mrs. Somers, then turned to Mary. "You can go," she added. "I prefer to see him alone."

He passed Mary in the hall, and on entering the room, came to the point at once.

"No doubt," he said, "Mr. Franks told you he had seen me."

"Yes, he told me," Mrs. Somers answered.

"Until to-day," Bedison continued, standing while she had not risen from her chair, "you had succeeded in keeping your connection with the office in Bude Street in the background."

"Why not?" she demanded. "Why should I publish my affairs? I don't know whether you have had much experience of such places as Lower Marling. The utter snobbishness of the people! My husband traded as Pascoe simply because it was the name of his predecessor. Though he was not ashamed of his business, others were. As soon as they learnt how he made his money, they cut us dead . . . the people we really cared to know."

"But," suggested Bedison, "I believe Mr. Somers died some years ago."

"Six years, but I am not the woman to be content with an

idle life. And what else was there for me to do? Why shouldn't I carry on the show? Well, I have carried on, with a fair amount of success, too, under the old name with Franks, who used to be his clerk, as manager. I wanted to keep the secret only for my daughter's sake. Perhaps I made a mistake! I sent her to a school where the training was bound to make her squirm if she guessed the truth. That's all the mystery, inspector. Very simple and innocent, really, isn't it?"

"You complicated it," said Bedison, "by entering into business relations with Mr. Stephen Purcell."

"As you have forced my hand," answered Mrs. Somers, after a short silence, "I suppose the best thing I can do is to be perfectly candid. Well, I had not been here many months before I discovered that Mr. Purcell was seeing a good deal of Mary. At that time his circumstances were such that I felt compelled to throw cold water over him. "But," she continued, "after the death of his little nephew, of course his prospects greatly improved. There was only one life between him and the peerage . . . a very bad life, as everybody thought."

"So you instructed your manager to approach him," suggested Bedison.

He saw that she was becoming more antagonistic every moment. She must have had a long day, and seemed to find it difficult now to answer his questions civilly.

"Why not?" she snapped out.

"You continued," he persisted, "to finance Stephen Purcell till you heard his cousin was going to be married. Then you cut off supplies and threatened to make him a bankrupt."

"I am a woman of business," she exclaimed. "Basil might have a son! Where should I be then? Why should I sit still with my hands before me and lose my money?"

"You drove him to—to desperation," said Bedison, in his most significant tone, and saw her thin lips twisted on one side. Miss Dunlop had insinuated that she was capable of cruelty, and as she sat there gazing vindictively up into his face, he could well believe her.

"Are you," she demanded, "suggesting that it was Stephen who poisoned his cousin? Is that what you're hinting at? And that I drove him to it?"

"Not at all——"

Rising from her chair, she flung out her hands while Bedison thought he had never seen a woman look more furious.

"Perhaps," she cried, "you imagine I had a hand in it, and that's why you're persecuting me! If I had, why should I have

allowed Franks to press him? If I had made up my mind to-- to put Basil out of the way there could have been no object in stopping Stephen's supplies. Sheer waste! You are mixing up two very different things. Because I am running Pascoe's it doesn't follow that I'm capable of a crime. You came here to-night hoping I might give myself away, only as it happens there's no more to part with, though there's just one thing I should like to tell you."

"What is that, Mrs. Somers? "

"Just this, Inspector Bedison. You may go to hell."

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### DIGBY GOES AWAY

THE chief constable was deeply impressed on Tuesday morning. In Bedison's opinion he was even inclined to take rather too much for granted. Because, after all, as Mrs. Somers herself had insisted, her connection with Messrs. Pascoe and Co. by no means proved that she had murdered Basil Purcell.

Major Radford, however, insisted that the woman was a thorough bad lot. She had come to Lower Marling under false pretences. If the truth had been known even Lady Redington would never have had any truck with her, though she had taken The Grove after it had stood empty for eighteen months. Not only had this imposter hoped to gratify her ambition by Basil's death, but also to obtain repayment of the not inconsiderable sum which her firm had advanced to pay Stephen's debts.

On Wednesday morning the chief constable sent for the inspector, explaining that he had some news.

"I don't know how it may strike you," he said, "but anyhow my wife heard it from Elizabeth Dunlop, and I thought you ought to know. Miss Somers is off to London the day after to-morrow."

"That sounds harmless enough," was the answer.

"Does it? I'm not certain. The question is: does her mother intend to join her? Is it the beginning of the end? We don't want the woman to slip through our fingers. I've told Rolfe she's to be kept under observation. He is putting Clowes on to the job."

"Do you mean," suggested Bedison, "that he's to follow her whenever she goes out in her car?"

"Yes, I do, inspector. No harm done, anyhow. And now," said the chief constable, "there's a private matter. I've asked Moulton to dine with me on Friday. He wouldn't come before. Prefers to hang around on the chance of seeing all he can of the girl before she goes, I imagine. I want to give him a hint."

"What about, sir?"

"I want to tell him what we know of Mrs. Somers."

"I shouldn't tell him anything we *don't* know," said Bedison. "If he thought you suspected her of the murder, a hundred chances to one he would give her a warning."

"Not he. I know my man. He would simply chuck the lot."

After a little more discussion it was agreed that there might be no harm in telling Digby what Mrs. Somers had in fact herself admitted, but the inspector insisted that the line ought to be drawn at that.

The chief constable promised to be circumspect and arranged that his wife should leave him alone with Digby after dinner on Friday evening, instead of staying to smoke a cigarette as usual in the dining-room. On the whole the visitor was feeling more cheerful than he had expected when he first heard of Mary's invitation. It was true that he had only spoken to her once when they met by chance outside Mrs. Fussell's general shop, but she had given him her number in Phillimore Gardens and promised to write every evening; moreover he fully intended to look her up at Mrs. Holden's one day next week.

"Digby," said Major Radford, when Mrs. Radford had left them and pipes were lighted, "I'm afraid I have some unpalatable news. I won't beat about the bush."

Digby looked more completely astonished every moment as he listened. At first he could scarcely grasp the fact that Mary's mother was running a money-lending business; that she had been financing Stephen Purcell in order to secure him for her son-in-law. When the chief constable became silent, he sat frowning and biting hard on the stem of his pipe without speaking for several seconds.

"Of course," he said at last, "I remember your telling me something of Bedison's methods. He intended to find out all he could about certain people here——"

"He has found something about one of them with a vengeance!" cried Major Radford.

"Ye-es, but what I should like to know is this," Digby persisted. "I confess the whole thing seems incredible."

"It's true enough, my dear fellow. There's no getting out of it."

"Oh, I accept it as far as it goes," said Digby, "but I should like to know a little more."

"I should have thought you had heard enough!"

"Still, outrageous as it appears," Digby continued, "I am wondering whether Bedison had, or imagined he had, any particular reason to connect Mrs. Somers with Purcell's death. He must have gone to a good deal of trouble over her. Surely he can't have had any definite cause to suspect her——"



"A delicate question, Digby. As it is I've strained a point. I count on your discretion. I couldn't say a word without Bedison's permission, and he stipulated that I shouldn't go too far."

"Too far! Then there's still something more behind," retorted Digby.

"Well, well, you must leave it at that. I didn't want to see you run your head into a hornet's nest. Good Heavens! What a terrible disaster."

"I can't leave it at that," Digby insisted. "You ought to have told me nothing unless you were prepared to tell me all. Don't you understand what I have at stake? My whole life may be affected."

The chief constable knocked out his pipe and refilled it before he answered, then he said:

"I will tell you this, though I've no right to. Mrs. Somers is addicted to drugs. You know the effect of that. One gradually loses moral control. She had access to Gregory's surgery where she could have helped herself to enough cardocine to poison a dozen people."

"Good God!" exclaimed Digby, "You don't mean to say that you believe Mrs. Somers murdered Purcell in cold blood. In that case why hasn't she been arrested?"

"You see how it is, my dear fellow. You may feel convinced of a person's guilt, yet you dare not make an arrest till you have collected enough evidence to obtain a conviction."

"Then Bedison feels convinced——"

"I mustn't go quite so far as that. A good man, but if you ask me, too mechanical. He's not taking any risks. But I can tell you this since I've told you so much. Mrs. Somers is not being lost sight of; Sergeant Clowes is keeping her under pretty close observation."

Digby rose from his chair, put his pipe in his pocket, and held out his hand.

"You won't mind saying 'good-bye' to Mrs. Radford for me," he said.

"No, no, that's all right," answered the chief constable. "I'm sorry, old chap. I couldn't stand by and let you spoil your life."

Having seen the visitor out, Major Radford at once joined his wife.

"A hard knock for the fellow," he exclaimed. "Still it was the kindest thing I could do. I only hope he won't shilly shally."

Mrs. Radford felt very sympathetic with Digby, and thought of him when she woke in the night. She was surprised, however, to hear that he was waiting to see her at eleven o'clock on Saturday morning, Major Radford having set forth some time ago to the police station.

"I didn't like to go without saying good-bye," said Digby, as she entered the room.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I've just sent a wire to tell my people to expect me this evening," he answered.

"Are you travelling by way of London?"

"No," he said. "As a matter of fact the trains fit in fairly well."

"You have given up your rooms at Corner Cottage then?"

"To tell the truth," he explained, "Major Radford gave me such a knock-down blow last night that I scarcely know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels this morning. I've got to think things over, you see. I shall write to Mrs. Harvey in a day or two, when I make up my mind."

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## CHAPTER XIX

### LUCY HARVEY

THE discovery of Lucy Harvey's address proved less difficult than Bedison anticipated, and no doubt Sergeant Clowes felt very pleased with himself. The inspector said that he had done well, and he certainly thought that he had.

He had succeeded in the first place in impressing Miss Fussell of the responsible nature of the duty she was required to undertake, and heard that Mrs. Harvey was in the habit of coming to the post office at intervals to purchase a three-halfpenny stamp and post a letter. On the next occasion, a day or two later, Miss Fussell diplomatically engaged her in conversation and managed to glance at the envelope which was lying on the counter:

Miss Harvey,  
23 Lovegrove Terrace,  
Paddington.

Sergeant Clowes took the address, carefully written on a leaf from his notebook, to the "Swan" on Saturday morning, another adjournment of the inquest having been obtained the previous day. At half-past five on Saturday afternoon Inspector Bedison was standing outside Number 23, one of a long row of houses each exactly like its neighbours save in the way of window curtains, and all let out in tenements.

After ringing the lowest of the four bells, he waited some minutes before a clean, sparely built little woman with her straight dark hair unbecomingly shingled, opened the door and explained with some asperity that Miss Harvey was always out at this time of day and never home till midnight.

Upon further inquiry Bedison learnt that she had a single room at the top of the house, and earned her living at some cinema in the West End. The landlady did not know what it was called. There were so many of them nowadays. Miss Harvey always paid her rent punctually, and her business was to sell programmes and show people to their seats with an electric torch, though it had nothing to do with her and she

made a practice of minding her own concerns; the only way with lodgers.

"Should I be likely to find her at home to-morrow morning?" asked Bedison.

"Any morning," was the answer, "though she don't get up very early, as is only natural, being late at night . . . especially Sundays."

"Perhaps you will say I shall be here at half past eleven," suggested Bedison.

"Shall I give any name?"

He said that Miss Harvey would not know it, and as he walked away scarcely knew whether to attach much importance to the coming interview or not. In any event, it formed a part of his plan to find out all that was possible about those who had been in touch with Basil Purcell on the afternoon of his death. It was true that Lucy had not been near him, but her father had, and at the back of Bedison's mind there was always the memory of the pseudo-waiter.

The present was obviously only a fishing expedition. There existed not the least proof that the butler had any cause to bear Basil Purcell a grudge, though the fact remained that one of his daughters had left home in unfortunate circumstances and that some man at Lower Marling had been responsible. Moreover, Purcell was a black sheep.

Knowing now that Lucy lived at the top of the house, Bedison rang the appropriate bell at half-past eleven on Sunday morning, when still some of the residents had not taken in their milk and newspapers. A depressing street although the sun was shining, but he was not kept long waiting.

Elizabeth Dunlop had said that Lucy Harvey and her sister were as much alike as twins, and it was true that both had very fair hair and skin, but Lucy's cheeks were slightly powdered, she had not disdained the use of a lip-stick, and Miss Dunlop had probably seen her before the days of her Eton crop. Her hair was now as short as a boy's, so her face looked rather larger, her features bolder. There was something boyish, too, about her figure, and she wore the dark brown frock in which presently, although it was Sunday, she would set forth to the cinema, where with her electric torch in hand, she would show into their seats people who could distinguish nothing in the darkened hall on entering from the daylight.

Having heard from the landlady that a gentleman had called on Saturday afternoon, who refused to leave his name, but would come again this morning, Lucy felt naturally curious,

and now opening the door, stood looking up speculatively into his face, while he told her that he came from Scotland Yard.

"What do you want with me?" she demanded. "I haven't been doing anything."

"I'm sure you haven't," he answered soothingly. "Still, I'm afraid I must ask you one or two questions. You needn't be afraid."

"I'm not," she said, adding the next moment, "I suppose I'd better ask Mrs. Prebble to lend me her room."

After leaving him on the step for a few minutes she returned to take him to a back room on the ground floor, a bare-looking room, with straight-backed chairs, muslin curtains, and a sofa too short for anybody to lie upon at full length.

"Now, Miss Harvey," said Bedison when they were both seated by the oblong table with its red and black cloth, "I have been compelled to make some inquiries at Lower Marling and I couldn't help hearing a good deal about you."

"Oh!" she cried, and lowered her eyes.

"I want you to tell me when you last saw your father," said Bedison.

"About a year ago," she returned.

"How is it you've not seen him since?"

"I don't see what that's got to do with you," she insisted, but though her face assumed a stubborn expression for a second, it soon cleared. She struck him as a good-natured, rather weak young woman, who generally found a difficulty in saying "no." "If you must know," she added, "he won't have anything to do with me because I won't go back and live at home. But I just couldn't and that's that."

"What about your mother?" urged Bedison.

"Mother . . . oh! of course, mother's different."

"When did you see Mrs. Harvey last?"

"When she came up by the cheap day trip about three weeks ago."

"I want you to try to fix the date," said Bedison. "What day of the week was it?"

"The excursion's always on Thursday."

"Did she talk about Lady Redington's garden party?" asked Bedison.

"Yes, she did——"

"Before it came off?"

"Just before," said Lucy.

"As that was on the 15th of last month," continued Bedison, "and Mrs. Harvey was here the previous Thursday, you must



have seen her on the 9th. Now," said the inspector, "I am afraid I'm bound to put one or two unpleasant questions."

"If you ask me," she retorted, "none of them's over and above pleasant."

"Of course you have heard of Mr. Basil Purcell's death," he suggested.

"Ye-es," she faltered, and looked down at the well-worn drugget again. "Mother sent me the *Carborough Courier* with a mark against the place."

"You hadn't seen Mrs. Harvey for quite a long time before she came up on the 9th?"

"No, I hadn't," she admitted. "Father would rather she had no truck with me. What he wants is to force me back home, though he never will. And," she added with a painful sigh, "we used to be such pals . . . father and me. A quarrel's always worse when it's with anyone you're really fond of."

"When your mother was here," said Bedison, "she naturally told you all the news of the village . . . of Mr. Purcell's engagement, for instance."

She shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows, as if she were trying to appear indifferent, but it was obvious she was far from that and a little might bring tears to her blue eyes.

"And in the circumstances," Bedison persisted, "you felt considerably interested. You were a little upset, no doubt."

She was suddenly upset now.

"If you must know," she cried excitedly, "I gave myself away, that's what I did. I couldn't help it. He was nothing more to me, though time was . . . you see, it made me think of the day I was coming out of Barstow's, the grocer's at Carborough, when the rain was falling in sheets, and he was getting into his car at the tobacconist's next door and asked whether I wasn't Harvey's daughter and couldn't he give me a lift. But when I came out of the hospital he sent me some money, and wouldn't have any more to do with me, and I've never set eyes on him since."

It was the easiest thing in the world to make her talk, especially as she realised that he must have heard her whole story at Lower Marling. Inspector Bedison had an insinuating way with him, too; and was exerting himself this morning to gain her confidence.

"Then," he said, after a short silence, during which she furtively wiped her eyes, "till that Thursday, six days before Lady Redington's garden party, no one suspected that you and Basil Purcell had ever been on . . . on friendly terms?"

"I wasn't going to give him away," she retorted, "and let father go for him as I knew he would and lose his job at Redington Court where he had been all those years. Besides," Lucy added, "I'm not that sort."

Bedison had already arrived at the conclusion that she was a very good sort, weak and yielding, no doubt, open to flattery and perhaps susceptible to bribery by small gifts.

"Just one more question," he said. "You were engaged to a man named Dowsett——"

Rising abruptly from her chair, she stood confronting Bedison with her finger tips on the table cloth, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining.

"None o' that!" she exclaimed. "You can cut that out!"

"After Dowsett sailed for Canada," the inspector quietly persisted, "you gave up your situation in London and went back to Lower Marling."

"Ah, if only I hadn't," she murmured, sitting down again. "How different things would have been! And I only did it to please him sorry as I was to leave Miss Dunlop, especially after all the trouble she'd had."

A casual remark, appearing to have no bearing on the case, but Bedison seldom passed anything by, seldom lost a chance.

"What trouble?" he asked sharply.

"About Mrs. Dunlop."

"I didn't know," Bedison admitted, "that Miss Dunlop's mother was alive."

"Oh well, it isn't what she'd talk of," said Lucy, "and she'd be better dead if you ask me. She used to give me the jumps from the first day I got to Sloane Square. Miss Dunlop was quite all right, and the old gentleman, but Mrs. Dunlop . . . but then what could you expect knowing she was off her head."

"Off her head!"

"She looked at you enough to freeze your blood," Lucy insisted, "and then one morning after breakfast she went for Mr. Dunlop with a knife in her hand."

"Do you mean she wounded him?"

"Ask me another. They hushed it up if you know what I mean. Two doctors were fetched and Mrs. Dunlop was taken off in an ambulance like."

"Taken to an asylum?" suggested Bedison.

"Somewhere out Camberwell way, so they said. It gives me the horrors to think of it now, and it's my opinion it killed Mr. Dunlop. Anyhow, he died soon after."

For a few moment Bedison found it difficult to bring back his thoughts to Dowsett. Never before having heard the remot-

est allusion to Mrs. Dunlop, he had assumed that she had been dead many years. He was startled to learn that she was in all probability still alive, and that in any case she had been an inmate of a private lunatic asylum. He could not make up his mind whether this fresh item of information had any bearing on the Purcell case or not, but his immediate purpose was to find out a little more about the man at Alberta.

"Of course," he said, "Dowsett wrote to you?"

"Ah yes," she answered, "and he'd say how much money he saved . . . you see, he wanted me to go out comfortable."

"Unfortunately," suggested Bedison, "the time came when it was necessary to tell him you couldn't go."

Biting her lip and screwing her mouth on one side Lucy nodded in silence. Looking back, as the inspector compelled her to do, she couldn't understand even now, how she could have been such a fool! Because she was looking forward to the voyage, and she was by no means sufficiently ignorant to misunderstand Basil's object, yet saying she would never consent she had consented.

"Dowsett," Bedison continued "didn't come over after he got your letter?"

"He couldn't . . . not then," she murmured.

"He has been since!" said Bedison.

"Once more she assented with a silent nod.

"You have seen him?"

"He came to our show by accident like," she explained. "He didn't know me at first. You know how dark it is when you come in from the street, but when I turned my torch on him I thought I should have dropped. 'Will!' I says, almost shouting, and then he knew."

"When was this?" asked Bedison, without a sign of the excitement he was feeling.

"On the Saturday . . . two days after mother came up. Saturday night, and he stayed to the end and waited outside, though I'd sooner he hadn't . . . oh! I don't know."

"You gave him an account of what you had been doing lately?" asked Bedison.

"He made me. The questions he asked! He came the whole way here. He made me tell him everything."

"Was Basil Purcell's name mentioned?"

"He wouldn't let me off. I couldn't help myself," said Lucy.

"Well, now," urged Bedison, "I want you to tell me where Dowsett can be found."

Her face grew stubborn as it had done at the beginning of the interview, but this time all Inspector Bedison's blandishments proved unsuccessful. Although he tried his hardest he could not succeed in obtaining Dowsett's address. She insisted that his mother was lying ill somewhere in the country, and when she protested ignorance of the locality Bedison could not make up his mind whether she telling the truth or not.

Lucy admitted that she had seen him more than once since that Saturday, but always at the cinema and during the afternoon. He was staying a few weeks longer and his position had considerably improved during the last two years. She was too artless to prevent the inspector from seeing that, rightly or wrongly, hope had sprung up again in her breast, and it was the fact that during the last fortnight she had begun to think that, perhaps, in spite of what had happened, she might embark on the voyage to Canada after all.

On leaving Lovegrove Terrace Bedison went to Scotland Yard, where he arranged with Chief-Inspector Rawson that a man should be put on to shadow Lucy Harvey, on the chance of getting into touch with Dowsett. Then after a short discussion Bedison once more set out to Carborough.

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## CHAPTER XX

### MRS. HARVEY

AT eleven o'clock on Monday morning Inspector Bedison was giving the chief constable an account of his interview with Lucy Harvey at Lovegrove Terrace, Paddington, and as he listened, Major Radford rose from his chair, taking short sharp paces from the office door to the window.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "the more we stir the worse it stinks, inspector. One would never have imagined there were so many shady stories in this harmless-looking village. Not that, after all, it's difficult to believe anything scoundrelly of Basil Purcell."

"Yes," said Bedison complacently, "I fancy we have arrived at one or two fresh facts. To begin with we know beyond a doubt that Purcell was the father of Lucy Harvey's child, that damnably as he treated her, she never gave him away; that till a week before the garden party nobody suspected she had ever had anything to do with him. Even then she had no intention to let out the truth, but when Mrs. Harvey mentioned Purcell's engagement, the girl seems to have broken down."

"Are you suggesting," asked the chief constable, "that the instant Harvey heard what his wife had to tell him, he made up his mind to do Purcell in?"

"I don't know for certain," answered Bedison, "that Mrs. Harvey enlightened him."

"She surely did that," the chief constable insisted.

"It's possible she was afraid . . . afraid of what he might do. I gather that he doted on the girl, was eating his heart out because she refused to come home, though as a matter of fact she has managed to keep her end up fairly well in London. I shall see Mrs. Harvey," Bedison continued, "but meanwhile, what about Dowsett?"

"He doesn't seem to have come to England in the hope of seeing Lucy Harvey again?" suggested Major Radford.

"I should say not. Still his interest may have reawakened on meeting her. It's not as if she had gone down in the world as so many might have done. She's quite well turned out . . . an attractive girl in her way. She admits that Dowsett managed



to get Purcell's name out of her. The question is whether remembering all he had suffered, he lost his head——"

"Yes, yes, inspector," said the chief constable, "I could understand his going for Purcell, thrashing him within an inch of his life, but not giving him poison. A hard-working man from up country! It doesn't seem in character, somehow."

"Well, sir, we must first catch the man and then let someone see him who remembers the waiter."

"You really think it's possible the two men are one, inspector!"

"Possible, yes, I do. I won't say more." A moment later, Bedison added, "I suppose it's not news to you that Miss Dunlop's mother is in a lunatic asylum?"

"Oh well, I've heard hints, but naturally it's a delicate subject, and upon my soul, I can't see it has the least bearing on our case."

"Don't you think," suggested Bedison, "that the child of a woman in Mrs. Dunlop's condition would be more liable to give way to sudden temptation——"

"It wasn't a sudden temptation, inspector. It must have been peculiarly deliberate. The poison must have been procured some days before it was administered. I should say," the chief constable continued, "that of all the people I know, none is saner than Miss Dunlop."

"Still, sir, imagine for a moment that we had enough evidence to charge her with the murder. Isn't it conceivable that her counsel might plead her mother's condition in the hope of her being detained during His Majesty's pleasure instead of being hanged?"

"Good gracious! You make me shudder," retorted the chief constable. "And one thing is certain. As things stand, Mrs. Dunlop's insanity can't be urged as proof of Elizabeth's guilt."

This the inspector, of course, had to admit, but nevertheless, the knowledge that the mother was mad did, as a matter of fact, tend to make it easier to believe in the possibility of the daughter's guilt. Bedison strove to keep an open mind. He seemed to hold so many separate threads, that unless the greatest care were taken, they might become entangled. There was Mrs. Somers, at present being closely watched by Sergeant Clowes; there was Dowsett, who was conceivably identical with the waiter, still to be found; there was Harvey, to say nothing of Stephen Purcell and Elizabeth, though these two belonged to a different category from the others.

Amidst all his investigations Bedison could never overlook the possibility that the knot which, in spite of his efforts he

had failed to untie, might eventually be cut . . . by the mysterious waiter! Granting that he was simply a thief, his ultimate arrest would be almost certain. Sooner or later he would set to work again and in that case he could scarcely evade capture, considering that all the vast resources of Scotland Yard were being employed for his undoing.

Then half an hour's examination might do more than all Bedison's attempts. Lurking in the marquee till the coast was clear, he had quite possibly seen someone approach the table and dope Basil Purcell's drink.

It was twelve o'clock that Monday morning when Bedison reached Corner Cottage, and saw Mrs. Harvey and Ethel bare-headed in the front garden, talking to Elizabeth Dunlop, who had stopped to speak to them in passing. He had caught occasional glimpses of Ethel without paying much attention to her till now his interest had been aroused by her sister.

The one was essentially a country, the other a town, mouse. Ethel had not been allowed to have her plentiful flaxen hair cut short, and her frock was considerably longer than Lucy's. Her face had a rather demure expression and her large, innocent-looking blue eyes seemed to be riveted to the inspector's as Elizabeth bade him "good morning" before walking away in the direction of Mrs. Fussell's general shop.

"Did you want Mr. Moulton, inspector?" asked Mrs. Harvey with her usual, woebegone expression. "Because he went away on Saturday morning."

"For good?" asked Bedison.

"That's more than I can tell you. Come to that he didn't seem to know what he was going to do. Anyone could see he'd had bad news of some sort. Not that he gave notice, saying he would write, though he hasn't yet."

"Anyhow," said Bedison, "I haven't come to see Mr. Moulton to-day. I should like a word with you, Mrs. Harvey."

She looked surprised, but invited him to enter the room on the ground floor behind Digby's sitting-room. It had a kitchen range but yet was scarcely a kitchen, there being a comfortable-looking sofa, two easy chairs, and on the walls innumerable photographs, including an enlargement of the butler's, in khaki. Opposite to the door by which Bedison had come in was another opening into the scullery, this in its turn leading to the large back garden.

"You may be surprised to hear," said Bedison, when Mrs. Harvey was seated with her hands resting on her knees, "that I had a long talk with your daughter in London yesterday.

Now I want you to tell me exactly what took place after your return on Thursday, the 9th of last month."

"What took place!" she murmured, clenching her hands tightly.

"Your husband wouldn't have been here," Bedison continued.

"Not likely, at ten o'clock o' night."

"Miss Harvey was sitting up?"

"She had the kettle boiling and made me a cup of tea and thankful I was after twelve people in the carriage," said Mrs. Harvey.

"While drinking it you naturally told your daughter what you had been so surprised to hear about Mr. Purcell."

"Not a word," she cried. "Keep them innocent if you can. That's my motto, though difficult it may be."

"When did you see your husband, Mrs. Harvey?"

"Not till Friday. He most always comes home in the afternoon."

"And when he came home you told him about Mr. Basil Purcell."

"Whereby," she said, "I've never kept anything back since we were married, and that's a good many years."

"What did he say?"

"He stood up where you are now," she answered, "and cursed Mr. Purcell enough to freeze your blood, though God Almighty knows he deserved it."

"In fact, Harvey lost his temper," suggested Bedison.

"Which he didn't and never does," she insisted. "I almost wished he had, but he stood with his hands by his side, looking as cool as I'd ever seen him, and he cursed Mr. Purcell something awful."

"Did he threaten to——"

"He didn't threaten nothing. My husband's not a man of many words, and he seemed to have worn himself out, if you understand me. But I knew he wouldn't rest till he'd done something. What father would, whether he lost his place or not? Only as it happened there wasn't a chance of speaking to Mr. Purcell. He didn't come to Redington Court till the garden party, and Harvey couldn't get near him till he was dead."

"You yourself must have seen Mr. Purcell in the park," suggested Bedison.

"I just saw him and that's all. I never left the marquee and I didn't want to go near him."

"You didn't see Dowsett there?" demanded Bedison abruptly.

Mrs. Harvey looked bewildered.

"Dowsett . . . Dowsett!" she murmured.

"The man your daughter Lucy was to have married if things had turned out differently."

She passed her hand slowly across her forehead.

"I was forgetting him," she said, adding with considerable excitement a moment later, "*Was* he there?"

"Anyhow, he is in England."

"Has Lucy seen him?" cried Mrs. Harvey.

"More than once," answered Bedison.

"Do you mean," she demanded, "that he came all the way from Canada on purpose?"

"No, said the inspector, "they met accidentally——"

Mrs. Harvey drew in a deep breath, and Bedison could imagine what she was thinking . . . hoping!

"Not that I see why you should fancy he'd come here," she cried, "knowing Lucy was in London. I shouldn't have recognised him at all events. None of us have ever set eyes on him."

Looking at his watch Bedison saw that it would soon be one and he wished to speak to Harvey before his wife had an opportunity to prepare his mind. Leaving Corner Cottage without seeing Ethel again, and inspector turned to his left, past the vicarage and the church beyond, till he came to The Grove. Nearly opposite to Mrs. Somers' five barred gates stood some farm buildings with a low stone wall and leaning against this, with a cigarette dangling from his lips, was Sergeant Clowes, who grinned and nodded as Bedison walked past in the blazing sunshine.

## CHAPTER XXI

### ETHEL

ON approaching the lodge gate of Redington Court, Bedison slackened his pace. Elizabeth Dunlop was standing in the shade of the beech avenue, and he thought she made a charming picture, with two of the keeper's children and as many liver and white spaniels dancing gleefully around her.

"Are you going to the house?" she asked. "Whom do you want . . . Lady Redington or Mr. Purcell?"

With the friendliest of "good-byes" to the children, while one of the dogs still ran yelping by her side, she walked on with the inspector, who explained that he wished for a few words with the butler.

"I suppose," Elizabeth continued, "I oughtn't to ask questions, and anyhow you wouldn't answer them, but I can't help feeling curious. First I meet you at Corner Cottage, and now after what must have been quite a long conversation with Mrs. Harvey, you are going to see her husband."

She paused as they walked slowly along the avenue, looking up inquiringly into his face as if she expected an answer, but all she received was a smile.

"Of course," she continued, "I haven't forgotten your suggestion about Lucy, but that seemed too wild for anything. I admit that I should love to know what is in your mind."

She would have been surprised, he told himself, to hear how much she herself occupied his thoughts, to hear in the first place what Miss Cathcart had told him about her relation with Stephen, then of Lucy Harvey's revelation concerning Mrs. Dunlop.

"One has to follow every road," he said vaguely.

"Though only one can lead to Rome!" she cried.

"That doesn't necessary follow," he answered. "Two or more may converge, Miss Dunlop."

"Yours," she said, as they rounded the bend and came in sight of the house, with Stephen smoking a cigarette before the door, "must be a thankless task. I daresay you have been discovering all kinds of undesirable things about some of the good people here."



As she spoke Stephen flung away the end of his cigarette, and came a few yards to meet her.

"Well, inspector, any fresh development?" he exclaimed, looking a little less cheerful than usual.

"Not yet, I'm afraid, Mr. Purcell."

"Upon my soul," Stephen continued, "I can't make out what you people are waiting for. I'll swear any jury would bring in the only sensible verdict if they were allowed the chance. I hope to goodness there's not going to be another adjournment."

"Inspector Bedison wants to speak to Harvey, Stephen," said Elizabeth. "Come with me, inspector," she added, and led the way into the hall, which Harvey happened to be crossing at the moment. "O Harvey," she cried, "Inspector Bedison would like to speak to you."

He had a small empty tray in his hand and stopped without showing the slightest concern, or in fact the slightest interest.

"Very good, madame," he said.

"You had better go to the smoking-room," she added, and Harvey turned to the inspector.

"Will you step this way, sir?"

A comfortably furnished room, with a pleasant smell of good cigars, several capacious easy chairs, and a thick eastern rug. Closing the door, the butler waited with his hands by his sides, to be spoken to again.

"I saw your daughter in London yesterday," said Bedison abruptly, and at once had the rare opportunity of seeing Harvey betray emotion. After remaining silent for a few moments, biting his lip as if he were struggling to maintain self-possession, he suddenly turned away to the window which looked on to the flower garden at the side of the house, and when he faced about again, seemed to have thrown aside his usual constraint.

"It's a twelvemonth since I set eyes on her," he said.

"Till Mrs. Harvey's excursion to London a few weeks ago," Bedison persisted, "you had no suspicion of Mr. Basil Purcell?"

"No . . . damn him!"

By this time Harvey was himself again. His grey face showed no sign of excitement. He spoke quietly and deliberately.

"You have lived here a good many years," suggested Bedison. "You must look on Lord and Lady Redington as friends."

"I've done my duty to them, inspector, and I don't deny they've done theirs to me."

"Why didn't you tell them what you had found out?"

"Whatever I did couldn't make any difference," said Harvey.

"Nothing could give me back my girl as she was. I wanted to deal with the cur myself——"

"To deal with him . . . how?" demanded Bedison sharply.

"I meant to tell him what I thought of him. If I had the strength I used to have . . ." He glanced down at his left arm, which Bedison remembered Dr. Gregory had said was often almost useless from neuritis. "But it wasn't to be," Harvey continued. "I couldn't speak in front of Lady Redington's friends. I meant to wait till they'd cleared off, but before I got my chance he was dead."

"Now, Harvey," said the inspector, "I've learnt that Dowsett, the man who was engaged to your daughter, is in England."

"I didn't know that, sir. I've never seen him."

The butler's bushy grey eyebrows were slightly raised and Bedison felt certain that his expression of astonishment was not simulated.

"Dowsett," Bedison continued, "had seen your daughter and heard from her the name of the man who upset his plans."

As if he could read Bedison's thoughts, Harvey slowly shook his head.

"You have never even seen Dowsett's photo?" the inspector suggested.

"Never, sir."

After a short silence Bedison turned towards the door. Although it was true that he had not learnt much either from the butler or his wife, the present interview had tended to increase his opinion of Harvey's good faith. His behaviour appeared perfectly natural in the circumstances, and nothing further was likely to be gained by prolonging the conversation.

Stephen, still hanging about by the door, accompanied him a few yards along the avenue.

"I half expected," he exclaimed in a bantering tone, "to see you lead poor old Harvey away with gyves upon his wrists."

"I can assure you that my job is none too easy, Mr. Purcell," retorted Bedison with more feeling than usual. Stephen's manner jarred upon him.

"Sorry!" he said. "I suppose you do your best according to your lights, but if you don't mind my saying so, they're a bit dim, you know. A shocking waste of energy."

Bedison was not sorry to see him go back to the house, and for his own part hoped to be overtaken by the Carborough motor bus and spared the walk to the "Swan" in the heat of the day. There were very few trains from the "halt" at Lower Marling.

Reaching the main road, he saw Sergeant Clowes still pottering about behind the stone wall opposite The Grove, and in fact it was almost impossible to keep a watch on Mrs. Somers' house without giving one's self away. Bedison passed the church, vicarage, and Corner Cottage, looking back at intervals in the hope of seeing the bus, when presently he heard light, hurrying footsteps, and turning, recognised Ethel Harvey.

She was so obviously trying to overtake him that he waited till she reached his side.

"I guessed you'd go to see father," she said as they walked along the road together in the glaring sunshine, "and thought I might catch you coming back. I've often seen you when you didn't see me," she added. "I was working at Mrs. Gregory's one day you were there. I often go out to oblige. You see, I do so much want Lucy's address."

"For some particular reason?" asked Bedison.

"I want to go to her. I want to see her. We used to be always together and now it's getting on for two years——"

"You could easily get the address from Mrs. Harvey," suggested Bedison.

"That's just what I couldn't," she cried. "I might be a child of ten and Lucy have something catching, the way I'm treated, but I'd give anything to see her, especially now."

"Why do you say 'especially now'?"

"Because I can guess what she's feeling . . . about Mr. Purcell, I mean, though I hate to mention his horrid name."

"What do you know about him?" Bedison demanded, remembering his conversation with Mrs. Harvey a couple of hours earlier, when she had insisted on Ethel's "innocence."

"As much as you or anybody," the girl retorted. "And I hate him more than I ever thought I could hate anyone."

"Not much good to hate a man that's dead," said the inspector.

"I'm glad," she answered excitedly. "When mother came back from London I knew she'd heard something though she wouldn't tell me. I thought Lucy might be in fresh trouble, and I knew mother would be sure to tell father as soon as she saw him. I hid in the scullery and heard nearly every word, though not where Lucy lived."

"I suppose," suggested Bedison, "you listened again while I was talking to your mother this morning."

"Yes, I did," Ethel defiantly answered.

"Of course," he said, turning to look at her flushed face, "you saw Mr. Basil Purcell at the garden party?"

"From the marquee," she admitted. "I heard him order the whisky and soda."

"You must have been pretty close!"

"I wanted a good look at him," she said. "It made me just mad to think of Lucy all on her own in London and him going to get married and have everything he wanted. When I heard he was dead," she added, "I could have jumped about and clapped my hands."

"What did you do," asked Bedison, "after you saw him leave the table with Miss Dunlop and the others?"

"I went back to help mother. She was washing up some of the tea things."

"You didn't wait till the man brought the drink?"

"No," she said, "I'd seen enough of him."

"You are sure you didn't notice anything that might help me to——"

"I don't want to help you," exclaimed Ethel. "Not to find out who killed him. I wouldn't lift a finger. What I want is to know where Lucy's living, that's all."

Although he refused to tell her, he went out of his way to explain that whatever hardships Lucy had endured since she left Lower Marling, she had succeeded in finding her feet, and there was no present need for anxiety concerning her. Then the motor bus coming along, Bedison bade Ethel Harvey "good-bye."

Talking her over at the police station subsequently, he found the chief constable very little interested.

"The vapouring of a child," he insisted. "What she says cuts no ice. For Heaven's sake don't let us add another suspect to our list. As it is there are pretty well half a dozen, and remember, only one can be guilty. Although some of the circumstances may seem suggestive, yet as far as the bulk of them goes, you're bound to be out of it. If it was Mrs. Somers who poisoned Purcell, all you think you've got against the others counts for nothing."

"I'm afraid," said Bedison, "we're hung up till we can put our hands on Dowsett and the waiter."

"Mark my words, inspector," retorted Major Radford. "The woman did it."

The woman he had in his mind, nevertheless, appeared to be going along as usual in the absence of her daughter. Mrs. Somers, according to Clowes's reports, continued to drive to the garage near Holborn almost every day, though it was scarcely possible she could be blind to the circumstance that her car was being followed. It was true that she had spent Monday

at home, hence the sergeant's presence over the way, but his motor bicycle rested against the wall so that he could be after her in case of necessity.

Stephen Purcell had gone away on Tuesday morning, intending to return for the adjourned inquest on Friday, and on Thursday afternoon, the chief constable being busy in his office, was surprised to hear that Mr. Moulton wished to speak to him.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### DIGBY IN LONDON

IT was almost the first time that Major Radford had received a visit from Digby Moulton in the market place, and he felt the more astonished because he hoped that his denunciation of Mrs. Somers had not been without effect.

He said the visitor was to be shown in, and as Digby entered was shocked at the change in him. He looked as if he had had a sharp, if short, bout of illness, and must certainly have lost flesh even in the few days, as well as some of his customary confidence and self-possession.

"Where have you sprung from?" exclaimed the chief constable.

"I came through from home without touching London," was the answer. "And I couldn't lose a moment. For God's sake tell me if anything fresh has been happening."

"About Mrs. Somers, you mean?"

"Yes, of course——"

"Well, no, nothing has actually happened since you went away on Saturday."

"Look here, Major Radford," cried Digby, "I must know how things actually stand. I can't taken it in even now. I can't grasp the fact that you suspect Mrs. Somers had a hand in Purcell's death."

The chief constable, leaning back in his swivel chair, turned sideways from the table, facing Digby with his most judicial air.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I've really no business to give away the secrets of the prison house. Still, I'm going to try to make you understand the exact situation. It's true that Bedison has more than one string to his bow, and that at present there's not sufficient evidence to justify Mrs. Somers' arrest."

"Her arrest . . . Good God!"

"I went out of my way," the chief constable continued, "to tell you what the woman actually admitted. I look upon her as a thoroughly bad lot, but Bedison seems to take the case against her a certain distance and there to drop it while he turns to someone else. Difficult to keep one's patience sometimes!"

You might draw a circle with half a dozen lines running from the circumference to the centre, but all stopping short before reaching it, as though he were waiting for the means to prolong one of them."

"Waiting—what is he waiting for?"

"To tell you the truth," said the chief constable, "he still counts on the arrest of the so-called waiter. His notion is that the man hid in the marquee and spotted the person who doped Purcell's drink. There may be something in it or there may not. Anyhow," Major Radford added, "what I am anxious about is that you shan't give the lie to your record."

"Oh, damn my record!"

"I have always looked upon you," Radford insisted, "as a fellow with more than the average amount of sense. You know, Digby, we've made up our minds you're going to do something . . . something big, before you've done. But not if you handicap yourself at the start."

"Handicap myself!" muttered Digby.

"What could be a worse handicap than to saddle yourself with the daughter of such a woman as your wife. You mustn't mind if I speak plainly, my dear chap. Your father and I were boys together. Even waiving the question of the murder, surely you know enough of Mrs. Somers without that, to see that Mary can be no fit mate for you. You stand at the parting of the ways. Weakness would prove your ruin."

"Well," said Digby, "perhaps I have been weak. I couldn't see my way. I wanted to think things over, but now there's been enough of that. I'm off to London at once."

A few moments later he was being driven in the taxi, which he had brought from the railway station, towards Corner Cottage, where, however, he did not stay many minutes. He told Mrs. Harvey that his future plans were still uncertain, then having changed the things in his suitcase, he entered the taxi again and, on reaching the platform at Carborough, the first person he saw was Inspector Bedison, who suggested that they should travel together. As it was market day the third class smoking compartment was full, but halfway to London they had it to themselves, and then Digby could not resist the temptation to question his companion. Bedison was not responsive, being evidently annoyed to learn how communicative the chief constable had been. Digby left the train exactly as wise as he had entered it, and having secured a room at the Capital Hotel, at once went to the telephone, found the number of Mr. Holden in Phillimore Gardens, and after holding the line for a few moments, recognised Mary's voice.

"Yes, Mary Somers speaking. Is it really you, Digby? Where are you. Actually in London. How delightful. I thought you were still with your own people. I have just sent my letter to the post. Half-past one at the Savoy? I am certain Mrs. Holden would be pleased to see you here. Very well, if you would rather. I will be there. Good-bye till then, dearest."

What he had told the chief constable was strictly true. Thinking of nothing but Mary since she left Lower Marling, he had, after his enlightenment at Hill Crest on Friday, been hesitating as to his wisest course, weighing the pros and cons by day and night, and at last arriving at a determination.

But before taking action he paid a flying visit to Carborough in order to hear the very latest news, since after all something might have happened to render his contemplated course unnecessary.

Like most people the chief constable prided himself on his knowledge of human nature. He thoroughly understood Digby Moulton, who no doubt had always shown a tendency to keep an eye on the main chance!

Without concluding that Mrs. Somers was actually guilty, Digby could not run the risk of ignoring Major Radford's opinion. Still it might be a mistaken one, and there would then be nothing worse against her than the connection with the loan shop in Bude Street. This was naturally to be deplored, but it did not seem probable that Mary would refuse to marry him if she heard of it. That she would refuse if her mother were arrested on the capital charge, however, he knew her well enough to feel certain. For what she believed to be his advantage she would refuse to be his wife, and consequently would be flung upon her own resources at the time when she most required support.

Digby had never for an instant hesitated about his marriage, as far as it depended on himself. That was where the chief constable made his mistake. The only question had been whether the situation justified what must be admitted as deceit.

Without a word of his actual reasons he intended to use every effort to induce Mary to marry him at once; he would move heaven and earth to persuade her to become his wife before she returned to Lower Marling. She should go home as if nothing out of the common had happened, and then if the dreaded *dénouement* should occur, it would not be possible for her to make any self-denying ordinance.

Digby Moulton was rather tiresomely honest with himself. He was not playing an entirely disinterested part. He was too straightforward to overlook the fact that he wanted to make

sure of Mary for his own sake. He had a difficult task in store for to-morrow. Not a word must be said about his real motive. The merest hint at Mrs. Somers' position would obviously defeat his purpose. What he had to do was to plead his own overwhelming impatience, and Heaven knew this was genuine enough. He could not feel confident that he should prevail, though he was prepared to go to any length short of telling the truth.

He would learn the date of her return to Lower Marling and implore her to meet him on the way to the railway station. Having been made man and wife each should go a separate way, she returning to The Grove, he to Corner Cottage, there to await developments.

In present circumstances the announcement of their marriage was scarcely conceivable. Mary had even stipulated that nothing should be said about their engagement. But if the chief constable should unfortunately prove to be right, and Mrs. Somers should be ultimately arrested, then Digby would assert his prerogative. He realised, however, that he was counting his chicks and lay awake again the greater part of the night wondering whether they would be hatched.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE

AT first Digby and Mary could talk of nothing but the joy of being together again after their long separation of a week! It was impossible to say what he wished in the restaurant to the accompaniment of the band and the talking and laughter around them.

She admitted that she was in no haste to return to Phillimore Gardens, nor had she the least objection to a drive in a taxi, to anything, indeed, which it was likely Digby would suggest. Along Regent Street they went, round Regent's Park, and so by Avenue Road and Fitzjohn's Avenue to the Whitestone Pond at Hampstead Heath.

Walking along Spaniard's Road they struck across the open ground to their left, following narrow paths amongst blackberry bushes, gorse, and bracken, till suddenly he brought forth his astounding proposal. At first she could not quite grasp his meaning.

"Mary, I want you to marry me," he said.

"She looked up happily into his solemn, almost stern face.

"I seem to remember your telling me something of the sort before," she answered, whereupon he added:

"Don't you understand, darling! At once. I want you to be my wife at once."

"But what—what," she murmured, "has been happening to make you suddenly so impatient?"

Then taking her arm, stooping by her side, he urged that during the last few days life had been simply unendurable. He could not get along without her. He had been tormented by all manner of detestable apprehensions. He felt certain that her return to Lower Marling would be the signal for more painful pressure to be put upon her. He wanted to feel confident that nothing on earth could ever come between them. Every word he uttered was true. He scarcely exaggerated his feelings, while yet he never for a moment forgot that he was completely deceiving her.

"Didn't we agree," she urged, "that we were to keep our secret inviolable? I tried to make you understand the reason.



Yet now you are calmly proposing to infuriate mother by telling her we are actually married."

Nothing, he protested, could be farther from his intention. He had not the least wish to provoke Mrs. Somers further, but only to place it out of her power to come between himself and her daughter.

"You say you are going home on Wednesday," Digby added.

"On Wednesday afternoon."

"What I want you to do," he insisted, "is to leave the Holdens in the morning, to meet me at some church on the way to the station, and afterwards take the train to Carborough alone. I shall follow later the same day, but everything will go along exactly as it used to do before, till we decide that the time has come to show our hands."

She had innumerable objections. Was he certain it was possible to be married at such short notice? She hated the prospect of further and deeper deception. Surely he knew that he could depend upon her as certainly as if she were actually his wife.

But he made an eloquent appeal as they wandered over the loneliest part of the heath, entreating her to let him have his own way, assuring her that he should feel grateful as long as he lived. And at last she began to waver, whereupon he grew more insistent than ever, so that she gave her consent, not because of the convincing nature of his arguments, but rather because she loved him and found it difficult to deny him anything, partly because she was thrilled by the prospect of the adventure, partly because she foresaw for herself a security which would make amends of many disadvantages.

Catherine Holden would no doubt be able to arrange that she should go to the station on Wednesday morning without anybody to see her off, though of course nothing must be said about the reason. Catherine might, perhaps, be led to imagine that Mary wished to meet Digby Moulton, of whom she had no doubt heard a good deal during the last week. And this would be true enough!

As they rambled over the heath, which they seemed to have almost to themselves this glowing afternoon, Digby explained that as soon as he had completed the necessary arrangements, he should return to Lower Marling, lest his continued absence, coinciding with Mary's, should awaken Mrs. Somers' suspicion. But surely, if she were guilty, she would feel thankful to know that her daughter had somebody to look after her, if not Stephen Purcell.

Before leaving London Digby promised to let Mary hear the name of the church and the fateful hour, then when everything had been accomplished in accordance with his most fervent hope, she stopped in a sheltered dell, suggesting that she ought to be thinking of returning. As she stood facing him, more shyly than usual, her cheeks slightly flushed, he thought that she had never looked so enticing before.

"There doesn't seem much time before Wednesday," she whispered, and at that moment Digby underwent a great temptation.

"Mary," he said, "couldn't we . . . couldn't we make it Tuesday instead? You could leave Phillimore Gardens a day earlier . . . we should be able to have a few hours' honeymoon, you know . . . Mary! "

He knew just the place in Surrey and could motor down from the church door. The Holdens would think nothing of her leaving a day earlier, and she could still travel to Carborough on Wednesday afternoon. She raised her eyes for a moment without speaking, and taking her arm he led her back the way they had come.

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### LOWER MARLING AGAIN

ON going to Scotland Yard after leaving Digby Moulton at the terminus on Thursday afternoon, Bedison learnt that although a close watch had been kept on Lucy Harvey nothing had been seen of Dowsett.

She left Lovegrove Terrace, Paddington, at about a quarter to two every day, travelled by Underground or motor bus to Trafalgar Square and walked to the cinema, where she stayed till eleven, and in fact it looked as if she had told the truth, that the man who was wanted had left London.

When Bedison went to Paddington for the second time on Friday morning she received him more antagonistically than she had done on his first visit. She knew she had been shadowed and resented the persecution. What had she done to be treated in this way she would like to know!

He assured her that she had done nothing.

"But," he added, "I am engaged in the investigation of the circumstances of Basil Purcell's death——"

"What do you suppose I've got to do with that?" she demanded, "or Will Dowsett either? He had never seen any of the Purcells, and I only wish *I* hadn't. He had never heard of their existence till that Saturday at the cinema. He has never been near Lower Marling and I—I don't want him bothered. Why should he be? What has he done? I should think you'd know how I hate to have him dragged into it."

"Then you haven't seen him since I was here last," suggested Bedison.

"Oh, yes, I have," she cried almost triumphantly. "For all your cleverness! He went to his mother in the country and she's so ill that he won't leave her many hours, but for all that he did come up and I saw him at the cinema as I did before."

They were in Mrs. Prebble's uninviting sitting-room and Bedison could not help regarding her sympathetically. He perfectly understood her position and felt confident about one thing. Whoever might be liable to suspicion she was not. It appeared impossible that she could have been at Lower Marling on the day of the garden party. It was conceivable that she

had been infuriated by the news of Purcell's engagement and carried away by a desire for revenge, but she was too well-known in the neighbourhood of Carborough to visit the place without recognition.

It was true that if she had been there on the afternoon of July the 15th her own people could not be expected to give her away, but she must have been seen by Elizabeth Dunlop and several others, and, in short, she could not possibly have had a finger in the pie.

Nor, Bedison felt certain, if Dowsett was involved, could she have any knowledge of his guilt. If she was keeping dark about his address, it must be, naturally enough, because she did not wish him to be reminded of the past. In Bedison's opinion the girl's thoughts were fixed upon the future, the future which she hoped, in spite of what had happened, to spend with Dowsett far away from the people who had heard of her backsliding.

Nevertheless Dowsett must be traced. He must be seen by somebody who remembered the waiter. A single glance might exonerate him . . . his stature, the colour of his hair, some trivial detail, might soon prove that he was not implicated.

Sir Wilfred Bird, the assistant-commissioner, for whose opinion Bedison entertained the highest respect, at Scotland Yard that Friday afternoon, at about the time when Digby Moulton's fate was being determined on Hampstead Heath, emphatically insisted that Dowsett had nothing to do with the Purcell case.

"If as you suggest," he said "he thinks of marrying the girl, the last thing he would do would be to run the risk of committing a crime. And if he did, the method would scarcely be poison. Radford is quite right in looking after the Somers woman. You know she was keeping something back, but you can't tell how much. *Cherchez la femme!* Cardocine was the weapon of a weakling."

It was arranged that a watch should be kept inside the cinema as well as out, in order to satisfy Bedison, who received instructions to return to Carborough, though to tell the truth, it was difficult to see what he would find to occupy his mind. On Saturday morning he went to the principal circulating library and selected some books to pass away the time, and on Monday and Tuesday won a few shillings from the landlord of the "Swan" at billiards.

On Wednesday afternoon he was smoking his pipe at the door when he saw Mrs. Somers drive past with Mary by her side, followed at a discreet distance by Sergeant Clowes on his motor bicycle. Bedison could not help smiling. The chief

constable's methods were too ingenuously barefaced. The woman must know she was being shadowed and even if she made up her mind to bolt, it would be impossible, with the evidence they possessed at present, to arrest her.

Although Mary could not pretend to feel unhappy, her conscience was terribly troublesome. Suspended from a chain round her neck, safe from observation, hung her wedding ring, and the deception she was practising made her more anxious to please her mother than she had felt for a long time. She listened sympathetically while Mrs. Somers explained that Susan, the parlourmaid, had given a month's notice, though it was annoying to hear that Stephen Purcell was expected to dine this evening.

Mary was quite alive to the irony of the situation, and while he was as expansive as ever, with a caress in his voice, she was asking herself what in the world he would say if he imagined what had taken place at Saint Botolph's Church, Kensington, at noon on Tuesday!

The oppressiveness of the evening furnished a reasonable excuse for Mrs. Somers' suggestion that the guest might like to smoke in the garden, and the three strolled along the path together to the herbaceous border at the end, when she suddenly and ridiculously complained of feeling chilly, and before Mary had time to offer to fetch her coat, turned towards the house.

On the other side of the path was a row of espaliered apple trees, and fearing that her mother's departure had been pre-arranged, Mary thought of making for a less secluded spot. But as she moved away, to her indignation Stephen seized her wrist.

"I'm not going to let you bolt," he cried. "I'm going to have another shot, my dear."

She tried to show a smiling face.

"A pity to waste your ammunition," she retorted.

"Do you know what I wish?" he asked.

"How should I?" she said, trying to free her arm.

"If only we lived in a more robust age," he insisted, "so that if you wouldn't come to me, I could take you and have done with it."

"I much prefer even the present amount of civilisation," she answered.

"Ah, my darling, you don't know what's good for you," he continued. "I could teach you what happiness is for the first time in your life."

Laughing as she tried more energetically to get her wrist free he drew her closer; while growing afraid now, she thought



of Digby and felt capable of anything to prevent Stephen from sullyng her lips. His own were by this time very near to them, and becoming frantic, she raised her disengaged hand, striking him with all her force. Suddenly she was released. His large expanse of shirt front was stained and he hastily took out his handkerchief.

"You little devil!" he exclaimed, and, turning, walked rapidly toward the house, Mrs. Somers meeting him at the sitting-room window.

"My dear Stephen, what on earth is the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh damn!" he answered, his voice muffled by his handkerchief, and brushing past her into the hall, he flung open the door and left the house. The little demon had struck him with her open palm, catching the tip of his nose with the ball of her thumb . . . a muscular young woman, confound her!

No one at Redington Court saw him again that night, and while shaving on Thursday morning he saw that what he always regarded as his best feature was ludicrously swollen, so that he began to dread the breakfast table and Lady Redington and Elizabeth.

"Good gracious, Stephen," cried his aunt, "what have you been doing to your nose?"

"Nothing that I know of," he answered. "I fancy I've a bit of a cold."

"It looks extraordinarily puffy," Lady Redington insisted. "Anybody would imagine you had received a blow; don't you notice it, Elizabeth?"

Miss Dunlop, however, diverted attention by reading out the weather forecast from the newspaper. Rain was coming at last!

"As a matter of fact," said Stephen, "it began before I left my room."

The consequence was that he went to the smoking room for his after-breakfast pipe instead of to the terrace, and a few minutes later Elizabeth joined him.

"I suppose Mary was at home last night," she suggested.

"For Heaven's sake don't you begin to torment a fellow," he retorted irritably. "I'll tell you the truth. I'm fairly fed up. Look here, Elizabeth . . . I'm through. I mean it. I swear that nothing shall ever induce me to put my foot inside that infernal house again. I want a bit of a change," he added. "I've a devilish good mind to cut away for a few weeks."

"Where do you think of going?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know. A few days in Paris wouldn't be bad to start with, and what about Switzerland . . . why do you sigh?" he exclaimed.

"Envy, sheer envy, Stephen."

"Well, couldn't you find a pal to keep you in countenance," he suggested. "We would see whether we couldn't have a decent time——"

"What an impracticable idea," she answered. "Besides, I don't think I should care to leave here while everything is so uncertain."

"Uncertain?"

"I long," she said, "to get the inquest over, to see the last of Inspector Bedison. While he is poking about I can't settle down. There seems a sort of suspense in the air."

"You know as well as I do," returned Stephen, "that poor old Basil did himself in."

"Still," she insisted, "I don't, somehow, feel quite so certain as I did at first."

"Why not, Elizabeth?"

"Oh well, I can't help seeing that Inspector Bedison is in a better position to judge than any of us. And I am certain he believes Basil was murdered."

"Nonsense! Who can have wanted to murder him?"

"I can't imagine, only I know this! I can't get it off my mind. I . . . I feel as if . . . as if there may be some terrible surprise in store. I couldn't bring myself to go away. I wonder you can think of going."

## CHAPTER XXV

### OPEN CONFESSION

WHEN Digby Moulton parted from Mary after their luncheon at a quiet restaurant in London on Wednesday morning, it was with the distinct understanding that Mrs. Somers should not be enlightened till a more convenient season.

It was true that they were already beginning to fret on account of their self-imposed self-denying ordinance, but they tried to comfort themselves with the prospect of seeing each other every day at Lower Marling, and protested that this must content them for some time to come.

When, however, Mary was compelled to endure her mother's vituperations after Stephen's hurried departure on Wednesday evening with his handkerchief to his face, she felt quite unprecedentedly rebellious. She had scarcely realised her altered point of view till she listened to Mrs. Somers' unrestrained abuse.

On Thursday morning she set forth in the car without a word of explanation or farewell, and at half-past ten Mary was standing at the window watching the rain, now falling fast, when Susan entered the room.

"I am sorry to hear you are leaving us," said Mary, who had always liked the girl.

"Well, miss, so am I for that," was the answer. "But being watched whenever I go in and out is a bit too thick. It's more than I can stick."

"But who can be watching you?" asked Mary.

"That Sergeant Clowes, and if he goes off, another of 'em takes his place. There they are, morning, noon, and night, too, I'll be bound if only we could see. Mrs. Clowes used to be at the vicarage before she married a few months ago, and I spoke to her plain. I'm not frightened of any policeman, and that's all he is though he don't wear uniform."

"What did Mrs. Clowes say?" suggested Mary.

"I'm not supposed to repeat it," said Susan, "and I swore I wouldn't, but it's all along of Inspector Bedison. He's having a watch kept on the mistress."

"Oh, what an absurdity, Susan!"

"He is, miss, on account of the murder."

"What can Inspector Bedison imagine my mother had to do with that?" demanded Mary.

"You must ask me another," replied Susan. "But they've got hold of something, or think they have, and anyhow they don't take their eyes off the house as long as the mistress is at home, and when she goes out, they're always following her. And I feel as if they were keeping their eyes on me too, and it's more than I can stick."

At first Mary was incredulous, but spending the morning indoors, while the rain beat against the windows, she presently grew perplexed. Not that she was capable of imagining that her mother could have the remotest connection with Basil Purcell's death, but what reason could Inspector Bedison have for suspecting her complicity?

Mary remembered his eagerness to see her mother that day Digby introduced her to him, and his second visit to The Grove, when she had been sent out of the room. In spite of Mrs. Somers' prohibition, Mary had promised to meet Digby . . . to meet her husband . . . at three o'clock in the vicarage garden. The day was impossible for tennis, but she intended to go whatever the result.

Indeed she was reaching a state of mind when it appeared that nothing of really supreme importance could happen even if her secret came out. She no longer owed her first allegiance to her mother!

It was during her solitary luncheon that a suspicion first entered her mind that perhaps Digby knew more than he had admitted. He was an intimate friend of the chief constable's, who would of course be aware of all that was going on. Could it be possible that there was something which he had kept from her knowledge? Mary remembered his abrupt change of front, his sudden urgency!

Ridiculous though it seemed to set forth in the deluge, she put on her mackintosh and found Digby waiting under the shelter of the lych gate, when he hastened forward to meet her, protesting that she must not stand there in the rain, whereupon she protested she durst not ask him to her own home.

His mind had been busy as well as hers, and since his arrival at Corner Cottage the previous evening, nothing seemed of much importance compared with the joy of their being always together, as now, surely they were entitled to be. When he insisted that she should seek the shelter of his sitting-room, she scarcely demurred, and a few minutes later Mrs. Harvey was astounded to see Mary enter her door. Digby unbuttoned

her wet mackintosh and made her sit down, whereupon she began at once to repeat what she had heard from Susan.

"Dearest," she added, "my thoughts are in a fog. I can't really believe the girl, yet how can I disbelieve her. Now and then I have been wondering whether you are keeping anything back, and, you know, you have no right to do that any longer, Digby."

He persuaded himself that since he had, in any circumstances, made her future secure, and since she would be bound sooner or later to hear of Mrs. Somers' connection with the office in Bude Street, there could be little harm in telling her so much now. She was naturally astonished, even dismayed, unable to speak for some time, but presently she urged that he had not explained why Inspector Bedison was keeping her mother under observation.

"Digby," she murmured, "I believe you are still hiding something and I simply won't put up with it."

As she sat close by his side, her eyes raised to his face, it became difficult to deceive her, though he took care to point out that while Mrs. Somers had admitted her relation to Messrs. Pascoe, and her manœuvres regarding Stephen Purcell, the rest was the merest speculation.

Still he admitted that the chief constable was having Mrs. Somers watched. It was true Major Radford insisted that she might be responsible for Basil Purcell's death, though it appeared that Inspector Bedison scarcely went so far. Digby assured Mary that for his own part he was suspending his judgment, but she covered her face with her hands and for a long time he could not assuage her grief. And she was inclined by and by to reproach him.

"That is why you asked me to marry you in such a hurry," she murmured, "because you knew that if I had the faintest suspicion that mother was suspected, I would never have run the risk of bringing disgrace upon you."

He could not deny the impeachment, though insisting that while being anxious to make it impossible for her to lose his support when she might the most need it, he had at the same time been afraid of losing her for his own sake.

"And whatever may lie in store," he urged, "you can't tell me you're sorry, dearest. From the first time I saw you, I determined to do my level best to go through life by your side, and now at the worst we can face the music together."

"Oh, but I hope it is not going to be so very, very much out of tune," she said, and when he went a step farther, insisting that the present situation was too intolerably tantalising,



she being so near and yet so far, she flung her arms round his neck and said he might do as he pleased.

"Well, then, I shall come at nine this evening," he answered, "and Mary, don't for God's sake make up your mind that your mother is guilty. It's quite possible that you have heard the worst about her."

He accompanied her to the door, and running across the garden in the rain, she soon reached The Grove, without having been seen by anyone besides Mrs. Harvey and Ethel. Upstairs in her own room, she changed her clothes, and before she had finished heard her mother downstairs.

Mrs. Somers looked wet and tired. When Mary asked whether she could do anything to help her no answer was vouchsafed, and dinner was a miserable meal. At a quarter to nine Mrs. Somers lighted a cigarette, and going to the sitting room, took up the evening paper which she had brought from London. Mary made no pretence to do anything but watch the clock as the hands stole towards the hour when Digby would arrive and then . . . it was impossible to imagine what would happen!

Mrs. Somers finished her cigarette and lighted another, and as she took up the paper again, persistently ignoring Mary, the clock struck. At the last stroke the front door bell rang:

"If that is Stephen," said Mrs. Somers, "I hope you are going to behave yourself——"

"I . . . I don't think it is," faltered Mary.

"Then who do you imagine it can be? "

There was no need to answer. The door opened as Mrs. Somers was speaking.

"Mr. Moulton," Susan announced, and as he crossed the threshold, Mrs. Somers rose abruptly from her chair, looking thoroughly surprised as well as indignant.

"I have come to tell you," he said, scarcely waiting for the maid to shut the door, "that Mary and I were married——"

"Married! " she exclaimed.

"At St. Botolph's, Kensington, on Tuesday morning," continued Digby.

As Mary stepped forward and took his arm, Mrs. Somers eyes swept the pair standing a yard away. Biting her lip as if forcibly to suppress the reproaches she longed to hurl at them, she slowly and silently nodded her head two or three times.

"I hope," she snapped out at last, "you don't expect me to keep you."

Digby assured her that she need have no anxiety on that score, and turning her back she rested her hand on the over-

mantel, her foot on the fender, the only sound for some time being the rain outside.

"Of course," she said, facing them a few minutes later, "I have no alternative. I am powerless. I can only accept the fact, intensely as I hate it. I never cry over spilt milk. Still," she added, "I would like to know why you suddenly decided to take the law into your own hands."

The situation was not a little delicate, but on the whole it seemed the best to give her at least some inkling of the truth.

"I daresay you know," said Digby, "that Major Radford is an old friend of my family."

"That is enough!" cried Mrs. Somers. "No need for another word."

"But, mother," said Mary, "of course it is utterly ridiculous  
\_\_\_\_\_"

"Unfortunately," Mrs. Somers interrupted, "Inspector Bedison succeeded in discovering a side of my life which I preferred to hide. On the strength of that he jumped to the most outrageous conclusion. Probably you share it." As Digby was about to protest, she raised her hand: "Anyhow, you persuaded this child to marry you as a sort of protection . . . a protection against her mother. Yet what I have done has been entirely for her sake. Now she has made it impossible to do more. She has beaten me."

"Mother——"

"The best plan," Mrs. Somers continued, paying no attention to the rather pitiful interruption, "will be for me to take Mary away. I will arrange to go early next week, provided Inspector Bedison permits. Then the marriage must be advertised in the ordinary way and you . . . you can do as you please."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### AN ARREST

ON this wet Thursday afternoon while Mary was sheltering from the rain at Corner Cottage, Inspector Bedison had a serious conference with Major Radford at the police station. The coroner had given a private, but plain hint that in his opinion the inquest had been adjourned quite often enough. He thought that the jury ought to be asked to deliver their verdict, certainly on Friday week, and in this event, they would be almost certain to find that Basil Purcell had committed suicide whilst in a state of unsound mind.

The consequence was that Bedison left the chief constable's office in a dissatisfied mood, which was not improved by the downpour of rain.

Of course the verdict need not affect his own investigations, but at the moment these seemed to be brought to a standstill, and for all the good he was doing at Lower Marling, he might as well be in London. At nine o'clock the same evening he was sitting in a corner of the billiard room, while Mr. Taylor of the Abbey Garage was making what promised to be his record break, when the old waiter entered to say that the inspector was wanted on the telephone.

A moment after he had taken the receiver in his hand, Bedison's manner changed. He grew instantly more alert. Sergeant Clowes was speaking. A message had just come through from Scotland Yard. An arrest had been made during the afternoon.

"Right oh! I'll come round at once," said Bedison, and with his coat collar turned up he walked rapidly through the damp, deserted streets to the police station, where the sergeant excitedly explained that a man had been arrested in the act of picking a pocket, at a political garden party at Highfield, though no one had associated him with the waiter from Lower Marling till one of the constables saw him an hour ago.

"What's the description?" asked Bedison.

"Five feet nine," answered Clowes, reading from the notes which he had taken of the message. "About eight and twenty. black hair. I suppose you'll have a look at the bloke, inspector."

"Too late to do anything to-night," said Bedison.

"You'll have to go to London!"

"Yes, Highfield's six or seven miles from Charing Cross. I must take someone who can identify him . . . Mr. Purcell for choice."

"He might motor you over," suggested the sergeant, and then, Bedison asking whether there would be any chance of a taxi to-night, Clowes said the quickest way would be to ring up Taylor's for a car. In less than ten minutes the inspector was on the way to Redington Court, hoping this was the beginning of the end. The rain was pelting as he was driven in at the lodge gate, but Harvey did not keep him waiting long at the door.

"Mr. Purcell?" said Bedison, and the butler answered in his usual quiet, formal tone.

"If you will wait I will take in your name, inspector."

A pleasant domestic scene; Lady Redington an addict to cross-word puzzles, with a pencil in one hand and a newspaper in the other, Elizabeth at the grand piano, Stephen at the table with a case of artificial flies open before him.

"Hello, inspector!" he exclaimed, rising from his chair, "something pretty important must have happened to bring you out here on a night like this!"

"You . . . you have not found the . . . the waiter!" murmured Elizabeth, swinging round to face the visitor.

"I hope so," he answered. "Anyhow I am off to London by the 9.10 train in the morning and I wanted to hear whether you could come with me, Mr. Purcell."

"Good Lord," cried Stephen, "why do you want me?"

"I have never seen the man," Bedison explained. "It's necessary for someone to identify him."

"You might take one of the cars," suggested Lady Redington.

"No thanks," answered Stephen. "Why in the world should I start on what I can swear is nothing but a good old wild goose chase? Come to that," he added, "I'm not a bit certain I should recognise the blighter. I imagine I should have to pick him out from half a dozen others."

"No doubt," said Bedison.

"Sorry, inspector," Stephen continued, "I'm not taking any. Besides, it's quite on the cards I shall be cutting away on Saturday."

"To-morrow will be Friday, Mr. Purcell."

"I had no idea you were going——" Lady Redington began, when he turned swiftly, facing Elizabeth.

"You knew," he exclaimed.

"Not," she returned, "that you would be leaving this week."

"Anyhow, you'll have to manage without me," said Stephen, turning to Bedison again. "A thousand to one there's nothing in it. Even if this is the man you're after, it won't alter facts, you know."

"He may," Bedison insisted, "be in a position to confirm what you believe to be the facts; he must have been close to the table where Miss Somers left her handbag——"

"Granting he stole the purse from it . . . yes," Stephen admitted. "But did he?"

"It's even conceivable," urged Bedison, "that he saw either Mr. Purcell himself, or somebody else, drop the poison into the glass."

Stephen thrust his hands deep in his trousers pockets, and shook his head as he walked about the room.

"You'll have to leave me out, inspector," he cried, and Bedison promptly turned towards the door.

"What are you going to do?" asked Lady Redington.

"As Mr. Purcell can't make it convenient to come, my lady, I shall try Mr. Moulton. I shall go to Corner Cottage at once."

Rising from the music stool Elizabeth crossed the room and rang the bell for the butler to let the inspector out. Harvey was in fact standing by the front door when Bedison reached it.

"Well, Harvey," he said deliberately, "I hope we've got hold of your waiter at last."

"Indeed, sir," answered Harvey imperturbably. "A soaking night," he added, as Bedison ran through the rain to his car.

It did not take long to drive to Corner Cottage, where Digby had returned only a few minutes earlier. He was in the act of lighting his pipe when Ethel Harvey took the inspector to his sitting-room.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE WITNESS

DIGBY MOULTON could not see his way to refuse Inspector Bedison's request. A nuisance! He did not want another journey to London just yet, but still it seemed to be his duty to assist the course of justice.

Having promised to be on the platform in time for the 9.10 train on Friday morning, he gave Bedison a drink, saw him to the door, and kept it open while he put on his mackintosh, then walked swiftly towards The Grove.

He could not go away for several hours without letting Mary know, and there would be little time to spare in the morning. There was still a light to be seen over the door, and while he stood awaiting admittance he realized that what he had to say might conceivably possess tremendous significance for Mrs. Somers.

"Forgive me for disturbing you," he said, on being taken by Susan to the sitting-room, "but I wanted to explain why I shan't see you in the morning—"

"Are you going anywhere?" asked Mary, looking considerably surprised.

"To London. I have just had a visit from Inspector Bedison."

Mrs. Somers looked up suddenly, while she put forth her hand, crushing the end of her cigarette into the silver ash tray.

"Is there anything . . . anything fresh?" she exclaimed.

She listened attentively while he told her of the arrest at Highfield, her eyes still fixed steadily on his face.

"Do you think you would know the waiter again?" she suggested.

"I'm certain of that," said Digby.

"I should have imagined," returned Mrs. Somers, "that you would scarcely have paid much attention to him at the garden party."

"I shall know him," said Digby. "I will let you hear the result as soon as I get back," he added, and then Mary accompanied him to the hall.

"Bedison wanted Purcell to go, but he refused," Digby continued, opening the door.

In his own room a little later he could not help wondering whether Stephen's refusal had any significance. From the outset, as far as he knew, no suspicion had fallen on Purcell, but it seemed strange that he should object to accompany the inspector. If he had the least fear of the waiter's evidence, however, surely he would rather have gone to Highfield and insisted that he was not the real Simon pure!

When the 9.10 train stopped at Carborough station it was too full to allow Digby and Bedison to find an empty compartment, and few words passed between them during the hour and three-quarters' journey. In any case Bedison seemed rather taciturn this morning, being probably preoccupied and anxious, while Digby for his own part, now the sun was shining again, felt much more hopeful than he had done for the last day or two, hopeful that he might not only be able to identify the pickpocket as the waiter, but also that Bedison might get enough information from him to clear Mrs. Somers.

That was his intense desire. In no circumstances was he likely to be troubled much by his mother-in-law in the future. In the course of a few days, he would be able to take Mary away, probably abroad, after he had introduced her to his own people, and if only Mrs. Somers' innocence were established, they could begin their life together without blemish.

Highfield, a few years ago a pleasant rural district, threatened soon to become a thickly populated suburb. Houses, rising in the meadows, were occupied before the walls were dry enough to be papered. It was necessary to cross London in order to reach it by the electric train, a wearisome experience after the express journey from Carborough.

On arriving at the new, red brick police station, they were taken in hand by Inspector Ware, who explained that Daniel Stocker, as he called himself on the present occasion, had already been brought before the magistrate and remanded for a week for further inquiries. He was known to have more than one alias, and there were several previous convictions recorded against him, so that the theory of his identity with Dowsett was promptly exploded.

Digby, who had been present at the conversation between the two inspectors was now left in a small slip of a room, furnished with a desk and a single chair, while arrangements were made for the identification.

"You understand," said Bedison rejoining him presently, "that you will see Stocker with eight or nine other men, and he will look rather different from before, when he was rigged out as a waiter."

"However he's dressed, I can spot him in a second," Digby insisted, and a quarter of an hour later, he was taken to a stone-paved yard at the back of the station, where several men, mostly enlisted from passers-by, were drawn up in a line; an odd collection, some tall, some short, some very shabby, some decently dressed, but Digby without the least hesitation indicated the fourth from the right.

"That is the man!" he said.

"You're a liar," retorted Stocker.

Now Digby found himself at a loose end, and lighting his pipe, he strolled towards a clump of trees, fated soon to be felled to make space for more houses. Meanwhile Stocker had been taken to the room in which Digby had waited, a constable in uniform being posted outside the door, while Bedison sat down in the only chair.

"You're under remand for a week, Stocker," the inspector began. "And next time there may be another charge against you."

"How's that?" demanded Stocker, a quite intelligent-looking man, holding himself upright, but disfigured by two days' growth of a stiff black beard.

"On Wednesday, July the 15th, you found your way to a garden party at a place called Lower Marling."

"Never on your life!"

"You got yourself up as a waiter—"

"What me?" said Stocker with a faint grin.

"Nothing to laugh about," answered Bedison. "I daresay you know that a man was murdered that afternoon."

"I know I wasn't near. That's enough for me."

"There are heaps of witnesses," Bedison assured him. "And if you're not careful, you may be charged with the crime before you've done."

It is possible that Inspector Bedison would not have cared to have a witness at this examination. It was not, however, as if he were attempting to entrap the man to his own undoing. On the contrary, he wished to convey the idea, without putting it into so many words, that it would be to his advantage to own up. And he saw that he was beginning to make an impression. Mr. Daniel Stocker seemed to wilt at the suggestion that he might be charged with the capital offence.

"Listen to me," said Bedison, "and it will be better for you. It's possible you may be simply bound over, but not if you try any hanky-panky."

"What are you getting at?" asked Stocker.

"A cunning dodge," the inspector continued, "to mix with the confectioner's men and make yourself useful to start with. You remember the last table you attended to, and that a whisky and soda was ordered. One of the ladies told you to find the butler and say the drink was for Mr. Purcell. You remember that, Stocker!"

"I swear to—"

"No, don't," Bedison interrupted. "We know too much.

"Then what the hell do you want me to tell you?"

"Nothing but the facts. Make no mistake! Now what did you do after you were told to find the butler?"

Stocker looked down at his boots for a moment, then raised his eyes with a self-conscious expression.

"I suppose I found him," he admitted.

"How did you set about it? I want more details," urged Bedison.

"I'd seen a bloke at the sort of counter," said Stocker grudgingly, "and thought he was the butler, though he might have been a lord or an undertaker. I told him I wanted a whisky and soda for Mr. Purcell."

"What did he do?"

"Told me to go to a party at the other end of the counter like for a small soda, and when I come back he'd poured the whisky in a tumbler . . . not too much of it, neither. He put it on a tray and I walked off with it."

"Was anybody still at the table when you got to it?" asked Bedison.

"Only one. All the rest of 'em had sloped."

"Which one?"

"The toff in flannels."

"What was he doing?"

"Seemed to be tying his shoe lace, with his foot on the chair."

"Did he speak to you?"

"'Put it down,' he says, and stamps his foot on the ground."

"Did he go away at once?" demanded Bedison.

"No, he seemed to be cursing his shoe."

"Of course," said Bedison, "you were impatient to see his back. You wanted him to clear off so that you could look inside the handbag which had been left on the table."

"You think you know something," retorted Stocker.

"So," Bedison continued, with a coolness which must have been irritating, "you went into the marquee. It was empty at that end, and you thought you would wait there till it was safe to come out. You stayed till the man in flannels sheered off."

"Oh . . . did I?"

"Now, Stocker, be careful," said the inspector. "I want to know whether, before he left the table, he touched the whisky and soda?"

"No," was the answer. "He didn't."

"Sure of that?"

"He just turned and walked off, stamping his foot as if it didn't feel easy like."

"Naturally," said Bedison, "you waited where you were till he got a safe distance. I happen to know, though it doesn't follow I shall tell anyone else, that you came out of the marquee a few minutes later and pinched a purse containing thirty shillings in Treasury notes and some loose silver from the hand-bag."

"Look here, mister—"

"Now you have got to tell me," Bedison persisted, "what you saw while waiting till the coast was clear. Come, out with it, Stocker!"

"Suppose I didn't see anything!"

"We won't suppose anything of the kind. While you were waiting with your eye on the bag," said Bedison, "you saw someone go to the table. Speak up!"

"Perhaps I did then," muttered Stocker.

"Did the man who had been tying his shoe lace come back?"

"No, he didn't. I've never set eyes on him since."

"You set eyes on somebody," cried Bedison, rising from his chair, and pointing at Stocker with his extended forefinger.

"It wasn't a man at all," was the answer.

Bedison, trained as he had been for years to hide his feelings, found it difficult to keep excitement out of his voice.

"A woman!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, if you must know, it was," said Stocker. "A woman."



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### INSPECTOR BEDISON IS SURPRISED

THE mystery now appeared to be solved. The chief constable was right. The crime had been committed by Mrs. Somers, as he had maintained. She would be under arrest before she slept that Friday night.

It was true that she had not been the only woman at the garden party, nor, indeed, the only woman who had fallen more or less under suspicion. But at this stage of the interrogation Bedison jumped to the conclusion that it was she whom Stocker had seen at the table, and an alarming thought occurred to the inspector. Had it been a blunder to bring Moulton to Highfield? What if he had told Miss Somers where he was going and she had passed on the information.

Being guilty Mrs. Somers would realize that there was at least a chance that she had been seen by the waiter, she would realize that her game might be up.

Bedison now began to attach greater importance to the chief constable's observation of The Grove than, to tell the truth, he had ever done before. After all it was not likely that the watch had been relaxed.

"Now, be careful, Stocker," said Bedison, sitting down again with his elbow resting on the wooden desk, "and tell me exactly what you saw the woman do."

"I couldn't see much," answered Stocker.

"Why not? She couldn't have been many feet away, and she stood full in the sunlight."

"She wasn't made of glass," said Stocker, "and she kept her back turned."

"You must have seen whether she touched the glass or not," Bedison insisted.

"She did take it in her hand—"

"Well?"

"And she kept hold of it a bit. That's all I know. Then she set it down again, but I twigged one thing."

"What was that?" asked Bedison.

"After she'd set the glass down on the tray again, she took

up the soda bottle and emptied it into the tumbler, just as if she was going to drink it herself."

"What happened next?"

"She put the bottle back and made off pretty quick."

"You didn't actually see her put anything into the tumbler. You're sure of that?" said Bedison.

"Only the soda as I've told you. I couldn't spot what she was up to before she poured it in, though I can swear she had the glass in her hand while her back was turned."

Well, that seemed enough. The problem had been to discover the person who had put the cardocine into the whisky, and Stocker had seen the woman tampering with it.

"And as soon as she went away, you—"

"I chucked it, that's what I did. A bit too hot it was getting for me. I'd had enough for one journey."

That sounded plausible. After Stephen Purcell's departure, Stocker had no doubt nipped out of the marquee, opened Mary Somers' handbag and annexed her purse, then seeing Mrs. Somers approaching, he had hastened back into the tent, intending to sally forth again to see what else he could lay hands on. But as she stayed some time manipulating the whisky and soda water, he thought it wiser to play for safety.

"Anyhow," suggested Bedison, "you would have no difficulty in recognizing the woman again."

"Not me," answered Stocker. "I never see such a head of hair in my life."

Bedison was again on his feet.

"What about it?" he snapped out.

"As red as they make it," said Stocker.

"Do you mean to say that the woman you saw interfering with the whisky and soda had red hair?" Bedison insisted.

"Fair carrots," exclaimed Stocker, "and no hat to hide 'em neither."

"Then," said Bedison slowly, "she must have been the same one who told you to find the butler—"

"That's the party, mister!"

The inspector's face had grown suddenly much graver. Taking out his handkerchief he mopped his forehead. He had obviously jumped too quickly to his conclusion. As he stepped towards the door, Stocker began a fervent appeal to be let down gently, and before it ended the constable entered the room to escort him back to his cell. After a few words with Inspector Ware, Bedison left the police station, to find Digby, walking, rather impatiently, to and fro outside.

"What about a spot of lunch, Mr. Moulton?"

"I daresay we can get something at one of the pubs about here," said Digby, and they walked on in silence, which he was almost afraid to break, till they found one with a bill of fare in the window. "It's no use pretending I don't feel curious," Digby added, when they were seated and had given their orders.

"Naturally," answered Bedison.

"Do you intend to keep your secret and take Lower Marling by surprise?" asked Digby.

Bedison raised his tankard of ale with the transparent object of evading an answer.

"I am much obliged to you for coming, Mr. Moulton," he said presently, "but I hope you won't mind if I don't keep you company on the return journey. The fact is I want to look in at the Yard. I can't tell how long I may be."

It was true that he wished to have a word with the chief inspector, but also he preferred to dispense with Digby's company, suspecting that questions might be asked which would be impolitic to answer. They travelled together, however, by the electric train to London, nor did Digby make any further reference to the business which had brought them from Carborough till they were parting outside the station. Then he could repress his curiosity no longer. It was, indeed, more than curiosity.

"Look here, inspector," he said. "I am going to tell you what nobody is supposed to know just yet. The fact is that Miss Somers and I were married last Tuesday at Kensington—"

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Moulton," cried Bedison.

"Thanks very much," Digby continued, "but you can understand that the best thing in the world you can do is to assure me there's no trouble in store for . . . for my wife."

Bedison only hesitated for a second.

"Yes, I can do that," he said, and Digby could not speak for a moment. "As things have turned out," Bedison added, "I am sorry to have put Mrs. Somers to the least inconvenience. If I may say so, we take no more interest in her."

The inspector had seldom had his hand shaken so heartily, and Digby travelled back to Carborough by the first train, with a great weight lifted from his mind. Meanwhile Bedison had gone to Scotland Yard, where even Chief-Inspector Rowlett agreed that there was now no alternative to Elizabeth Dunlop's arrest. Notwithstanding the shady reputation of Daniel Stocker, he must be regarded as, in the present case, an entirely disinterested witness, who could have nothing to gain by giving a false account of what he had seen from the marquee.

Bedison had to wait some time for a train, which stopped at several stations, so that he did not arrive at Carborough till after half-past eight. Taking a taxi at the station, he was driven to the market place, where he learnt that the chief constable had left some hours earlier, though Clowes was in the building. The sergeant was, in fact, on the point of going home, but found himself taken possession of by the inspector, hustled into the cab and promised an explanation on the way to Redington Court.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

### AT REDINGTON COURT

LADY REDINGTON was not accustomed to worry over trifles. She generally took life easily, but she had been in a more or less anxious state of mind since the morning.

Lord Redington, who occupied a room leading from her own, had passed a restless night, and Elizabeth, hearing her moving about, had got up in the small hours to see whether she could be of any service.

Dr. Gregory was telephoned for after breakfast and suggested on his arrival, not for the first time, that Lord Redington ought to have a trained nurse.

"But," Lady Redington objected, "he hates to have anybody about him but me or Elizabeth and I am certain she's as good as any trained nurse in the world."

Dr. Gregory, however, was speaking as much for her advantage as for his patient's. He thought that Miss Dunlop was looking overdone.

"We mustn't overdrive a willing horse, Lady Redington," he insisted. "But we will see how Lord Redington is to-morrow." Then he turned to Elizabeth, who could be depended upon to carry out his directions more exactly than Lady Redington. "Have you any veronal in the house?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "You told me to get some in case it was wanted after the garden party, but as a matter of fact I didn't open the bottle."

"Well, I should give him one tabloid when you put him to bed," said the doctor, "and if he's still awake four hours later, let him have another, but not more than two altogether."

After luncheon Lady Redington spoke to Stephen quite seriously. She felt sorry that he was going away just now. She was convinced that his uncle was not so well as usual, and besides it was impossible to tell the result of Inspector Bedington's journey to London.

"If he should be right," she continued, "and someone is arrested for poor Basil's murder—"

"Basil wasn't murdered," Stephen interrupted.



"Still," Lady Redington insisted, "it's impossible to be certain, and what with one thing and another, I really think you ought to be here."

"Oh well, if you put it in that way," he answered, "of course you leave me no choice."

"Thank you," she said, and then turned her attention to Elizabeth. "The best thing you can do," she urged, "is to go to your room and lie down this afternoon. You are not looking at all well—"

"No wonder," cried Stephen, "considering she was up half last night."

"And," said Lady Redington, "I am afraid you won't get to bed early to-night if you have to give the second tabloid at one o'clock. Elizabeth always manages your uncle so much better than I can, Stephen."

"Oh, Elizabeth's top hole," he answered, sending her away with a smile on her face, nor did she reappear till half-past four. After tea with the others, she went to Lord Redington's room, where she stayed reading aloud till the time to dress for dinner.

She wore a black frock this evening, cut low enough to show the contrasting whiteness of her shoulders, while her face looked rather paler than usual, making her freckles more noticeable.

"I can't help feeling curious to hear how Inspector Bedison has been getting along," said Lady Redington when Harvey and the footman had left the dining-room.

"Doubtful whether he'll get back to-night," answered Stephen. "I might look in at the police station during the morning."

"Or," suggested Lady Redington, "we could ring up Major Radford after breakfast."

"What a tremendous hurry you're in!" cried Stephen, as Elizabeth rose before anyone else had left the table.

"I want to make Lord Redington comfortable and give him his veronal," she explained. "You will come to say good-night to him before nine," she added, and when Stephen sought the smoking-room ten minutes later, Lady Redington went upstairs. She had come down again, and taken a chair in the drawing-room, when the front door bell rang, and Harvey on answering it saw a taxi cab outside, and Bedison on the threshold.

"I want to see Miss Dunlop," he said, a little more sharply than usual.

"Miss Dunlop is with his lordship, inspector," answered the butler.

"Just go up and say I want to speak to her," Bedison insisted, and as the butler stepped towards the stairs Stephen came out of the smoking-room with a cigar between his lips.

"Well, inspector, what's the news from Highfield?" he exclaimed. "Miss Dunlop is engaged at the moment. Can't I answer your purpose?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Purcell."

"Did you see the blighter?" asked Stephen.

"Yes—"

"What about him, was he anything like the waiter?"

"He was the man," said Bedison significantly.

"The devil he was!"

Meanwhile Harvey had gone upstairs in his sedate way and tapped at the door of Lord Redington's room. The old man lay comfortably in bed. With some difficulty he had been induced to swallow the tabloid, and the phial which had been opened a few minutes earlier was still in Elizabeth's hand. Going to the door she was told in a whisper that Inspector Bedison wished to see her.

"Very well," she answered in an equally low voice. "I will come down at once."

Without staying to close the door she returned to Lord Redington's side.

"Quite comfy?" she asked, leaning over him.

"Yes, thank you, my dear."

"Well, now, you're to shut your eyes and go to sleep in five minutes. You understand!"

He smiled as she stooped lower to kiss his forehead, then only staying to switch off the light, without even looking in the glass, she left the room and ran swiftly downstairs.

"Do you want me, inspector?" she asked, seeing him talking to Stephen in the hall.

"Better come in," suggested Stephen, leading the way into the smoking-room, Elizabeth following, while Bedison brought up the rear.

"I should like to speak to Miss Dunlop alone, if you please, Mr. Purcell," he said.

Stephen looked at him dubiously for a moment, then turned away with a shrug.

"Oh, very well!" he exclaimed.

"Nonsense," said Elizabeth. "As if there could be anything to say which you mayn't hear."

"Well, what am I to do?" demanded Stephen, with his back to the door, smiling as he looked from one face to the other.

"Stay, of course."

"Right oh!" he cried, and then without any further loss of time, Bedison, turned to Elizabeth.

"It is my duty," he said, "to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence—"

"What the hell do you mean?" demanded Stephen, while she, looking pitifully nervous, sat down in the nearest chair, creating the impression, indeed, that she had not the strength left to stand. Her hands were not still for a moment, and Bedison, observing her intently, saw that in one of them she held a small glass phial containing white tablets, while with the other she was continually unscrewing and screwing the metal cap.

"You have not forgotten," said Bedison, "the garden party on the 15th of last month."

"I am never likely to forget it," she murmured.

"You left the table with Mr. Basil Purcell," the inspector continued, "and a few minutes later you returned to it alone."

"Rot!" exclaimed Stephen, and Bedison noticed that he had changed his position, and was now standing behind Elizabeth with his hand resting on her chair. He appeared to have taken up a protective attitude, and the usual careless expression of his face had entirely left it. For once, in Bedison's experience, Stephen Purcell looked portentously solemn. "You are altogether out of it," he continued. "I was the last to leave the table. I recollect perfectly. My confounded shoe lace broke. If Miss Dunlop had come back I should have been bound to see her."

"Inspector Bedison is quite right," said Elizabeth quietly. "It is true that I went back. I waited to make certain you had joined the others, Stephen."

"But, good God, Elizabeth—"

Inspector Bedison interrupted him:

"You found a glass containing some whisky on a salver," he said.

"Ye . . . es," she admitted. Still her fingers were busy with the cap of the phial.

"You put something into it," said Bedison.

"That," shouted Stephen, "is an infernal lie."

"No," said Elizabeth, "I poured in the soda water."

"You have never mentioned this before, Miss Dunlop," answered Bedison.

"Why . . . why should I?" she faltered.

"You remember that I questioned you—"

"And I told you every single thing I knew that could by any stretch of possibility be connected with Basil's death," she said. "My pouring the soda water into the tumbler could not

have had anything to do with it. Naturally it was the thing I did not care to call attention to."

"Why not?"

She raised her eyes deprecatingly to Stephen's face. In his obvious agitation he had left her chair and taken two or three short paces across the room. Now he drew nearer again, resting his hand on her shoulder.

"Basil," she murmured, "had been in the habit of drinking too much. Dr. Gregory had warned not only him, but Lady Redington also. She had even given the butler particular instructions to let him have as little as possible, and on no account allow him to help himself. That was the reason why, when he asked for whisky at the garden party, I insisted that the waiter should tell Harvey whom it was for. Because it was quite evident that Basil had already had too much before his arrival. But," Elizabeth continued, "after I had left the table, I wondered whether Harvey, having so much to do that afternoon, might forget and send the decanter. I was afraid lest Basil should make a scene, and I went back to make certain. When I took up the glass I saw that there was very little whisky in it, but knowing he sometimes drank it almost neat, I poured in all the soda water. I thought it would have less effect the more it was diluted."

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE LAST

AN ingenious explanation, no doubt, but Bedison did not believe a word of it. Of course she had had the whole day to invent the excuse.

"Now I hope you're satisfied, inspector," exclaimed Stephen. The inspector paid no attention.

"I must arrest you, Miss Dunlop," he began, when she rose in intense agitation, with the phial clasped tightly in her right hand. Bedison was keeping his eyes on it.

"Arrest me!" she cried, staring in a dazed way as if she could not grasp the purport of his words.

"For the murder of Basil Purcell—"

"You must be mad," retorted Stephen, standing by her side, and linking arms. "You have heard Miss Dunlop's explanation. Good Heavens! what more do you want?"

"That must be made before the magistrates in the morning," said Bedison. "For the present you will have to come with me to Carborough. I have a taxi outside."

"Shall I . . . Shall I have to . . . sleep there?" she faltered.

"I am afraid you will."

"A damnable shame!" exclaimed Stephen. "But you may be certain of one thing. We'll pretty quickly make things right to-morrow."

For a second there was silence, then Elizabeth advanced a step towards the door.

"I . . . I suppose I had better get some things," she said.

"Sorry," answered Bedison. "I can't allow you out of my sight."

"Good God, man," cried Stephen, "she can't go without clothes."

"Perhaps," was the answer, "you will order what is necessary while Miss Dunlop stays here."

"Ask Lady Redington, Stephen. She won't mind seeing to it for me."

"Hadden't you better sit down again," suggested the inspector not ungently as Stephen left the room. She had almost reached the end of her tether, and taking the chair from which she had



recently risen, began to twist the metal cap of the phial in the same nervous way.

Meanwhile Stephen went to the drawing-room, reaching it before Harvey, who was waiting in the hall, had time to open the door. When Stephen blurted out the news, Lady Redington looked so ludicrously startled that he might have laughed at any other time. At first she insisted on going at once to tell Inspector Bedison what she thought of him, but presently Stephen succeeded in persuading her that nothing could prevent Elizabeth from being taken to Carborough to-night, though they would see to it that she was released to-morrow morning.

While Lady Redington went to tell her maid to put some clothes together, Stephen waited her return.

"Take my advice," he urged, when she entered with the suit case five minutes later. "You won't make things better for Elizabeth by putting Bedison's back up."

"But it's so atrocious, so absurd!" cried Lady Redington. "Elizabeth of all people! Really I can't believe it even now."

She was crossing the hall as she spoke, nor seemed to have the slightest objection to being overheard by Harvey who came forward to open the smoking-room door.

"My poor dear child!" she said, hastening towards Elizabeth, who rose to meet her. "Surely," Lady Redington continued, "you are not going to persist, inspector—"

"I must do my duty, Lady Redington," answered Bedison, then held out his hand: "I will take that suit case, if you please."

"Oughtn't you to have a coat or something?" suggested Stephen.

"How stupid of me!" cried Lady Redington. "But I positively haven't the least idea what I am doing to-night. Stephen, tell Harvey to fetch Elizabeth's coat."

"The . . . the grey one from my wardrobe," said Elizabeth, and opening the door, Stephen seeing the butler just outside gave the order.

"From Miss Dunlop's wardrobe. Very good, sir." Harvey went towards the stairs, but Stephen had barely returned to the smoking-room when he entered, closing the door carefully behind him.

"Where is Miss Dunlop's coat?" demanded Lady Redington.

"I beg pardon—"

"What is it, Harvey?" Lady Redington spoke more impatiently than usual.

Harvey turned to Bedison:

"I wish to make a statement."

The inspector was instantly on the alert.

"It was me," said Harvey, "that killed Mr. Purcell . . . damn him!"

Harvey stood by the table, on which he now rested his finger tips as if for support. Although his face looked greyer than ever, its expression was scarcely less impassive. There was no one in the room who did not feel sorry for him, and Elizabeth had covered her face with her hands. The inspector asked for some notepaper, and when he had taken his pen from his pocket sat down repeating the formal warning which only a little while ago he had given to Elizabeth.

"Mr. Purcell," said the butler, in a low, level tone, as if he were repeating a lesson learnt by rote, "ruined my dear girl. I had a happy home. He broke it up. He made my life a hell. But till my wife, God help her, came back from London, none of us ever suspected him. If he had been here I'd have shot him that day. I'd have shot him like a dog. He wasn't coming till the Wednesday and I swore he should never go away again. I took some cardocine from Dr. Gregory's surgery. When he asked for a drink that would settle him. If he didn't I'd kept my pistol ever since the war and it was in my pocket. When the waiter came for the whisky I sent him for a bottle of soda water, so the powder should have time to melt. No one had seen me take the paper from my waistcoat pocket, and I didn't think I should ever be found out, only I couldn't let anyone else suffer, let alone Miss Dunlop."

The statement had taken some time to make, because of the pauses necessary to allow of its being taken down in long hand.

"Well, Harvey," said the inspector as he ceased speaking, "you had better read this over, and if it's correct, put your name to it."

"Very good, sir."

His hand shook as he held the sheet of paper, which he had scarcely time to read, before laying it on the table.

"Quite right," he said, whereupon Bedison held out his pen. Taking it in his hand Harvey bent over the table, slowly affixing his signature. "I'm ready, inspector," he added, "if I may put one or two things in a parcel."

"Where are they?" asked Bedison.

"Upstairs in my room, sir."

"I will go with you."

It is doubtful whether even Stephen's eyes were dry as Bedison followed Harvey closely out of the room.

"That poor woman," said Lady Redington, "and Ethel!"

"And . . . and Lucy," murmured Elizabeth.

"What a lot of mischief Basil managed to do in his life," cried Lady Redington; then they were all silent.

"What was that?" said Elizabeth.

"Good God!" exclaimed Stephen, already at the door. On reaching the hall he saw Bedison leaning over the balusters.

"Mr. Purcell," he said, "you will find Clowes outside in a taxi. Tell him to fetch Dr. Gregory at once."

Without answering or losing a moment Stephen opened the front door. The driver let in his clutch and was off immediately, Purcell standing in the drive, looking at the red light till it disappeared round the curve in the avenue. As he rejoined the two anxious women Bedison came downstairs.

"I was bound to send for the doctor," he explained, following Stephen into the smoking-room, "but Harvey is dead."

"How did it happen?" asked Stephen.

"I was taken off my guard," the inspector admitted. "I always look out for that sort of thing, but directly we entered the bedroom he went to the chest of drawers and opened one of them. He stooped over it as if to get out some clothes and the pistol must have been there. He shot himself in the mouth."

The instant Bedison ceased speaking Elizabeth walked to the door.

"Where are you off to?" asked Stephen, as the others stood in a group.

"I have been forgetting Lord Redington. If he was awake and heard the shot he will be in a terrible state of mind."

Still she did not go straight to his room, but stopping at the telephone, which communicated with the garage, took off the receiver and ordered the saloon car to come to the door as soon as possible. To her relief she found that Lord Redington, under the influence of the veronal, was sleeping quietly, and then she went to her own room. For a moment she stood clasping her hands to her head. She had been frantically alarmed, not at any ultimate evil which might befall her, but at the immediate prospect of spending a night in the police station. That was not a prospect she could reason about; she was terrified. With a single exception it was the worst experience of her life, and oddly her thoughts now flew back to the one which had been even worse: to the day when her mother had been knocked down at Hyde Park Corner and carried to St. George's Hospital with

a fractured skull . . . the beginning of the trouble which ended some years later, in her removal to the asylum at Camberwell.

Going to her wardrobe Elizabeth took out her grey coat, thrust her arms into the sleeves, and put on her hat. On going downstairs she found Lady Redington talking excitedly to Stephen and Bedison, who was waiting impatiently for the return of Sergeant Clowes with the doctor.

The events of the last hour had proved almost too much for Lady Redington. She had been so startled by Harvey's intervention that she failed to realize for the time the difference it made to Elizabeth. In her regret for the old servant she had omitted to congratulate the girl upon her escape from an extremely painful experience.

She now, however, bustled forward with her hands outstretched, but stopped abruptly a yard away.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, "why in the world have you been putting on your outdoor clothes? Where are you thinking of going at this time of night? On such a night, too!"

"Was it you who ordered the car?" demanded Stephen.

"I have seen Lord Redington. He is quite all right," answered Elizabeth. "And I am going to Corner Cottage."

"But my dear child, Inspector Bedison will tell poor Mrs. Harvey—"

"I intended to see her on my way to Carborough," he said. Elizabeth shook her head.

"I know her better than anybody," she insisted. "It will be better for me to go."

"Then," said Stephen, "I shall go with you."

"No, you must let me go alone, please," she answered, "and besides, you ought to wait to speak to Dr. Gregory. I can't tell how long I shall be," Elizabeth added, "but I am certain to get back in time to look at Lord Redington at one o'clock."

"You think of everything," murmured Lady Redington.

Then Elizabeth turned to Bedison.

"I am sorry, Miss Dunlop," he said.

"How I wish," she returned, "you had never found that wretched waiter."

With that she left the room, followed by Stephen who opened the door of the car and tucked the rug round her legs.

"I don't envy you the job," he said, as he stepped backwards. She mustered the faintest of smiles as she was driven away and Stephen returned to the smoking-room.

"I shouldn't think Gregory would be much longer," he exclaimed.

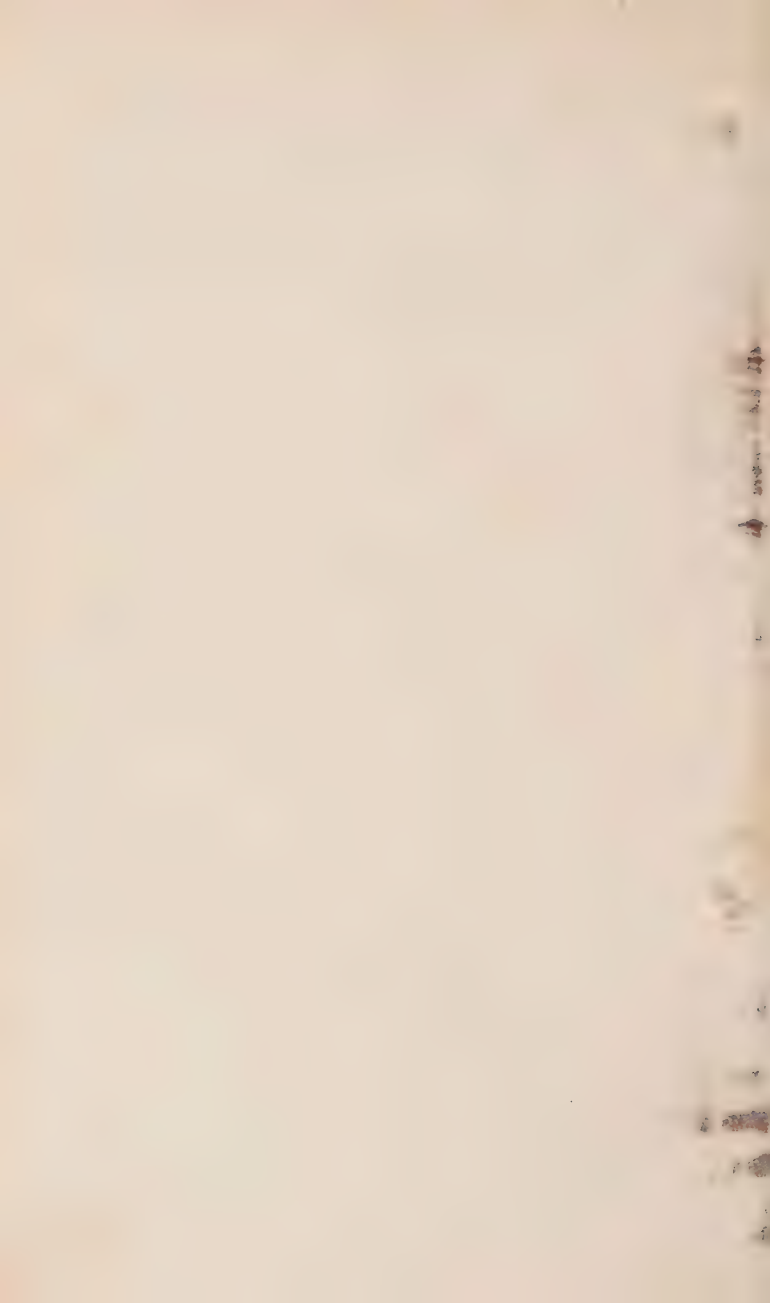
"How Elizabeth can take such a painful task on herself after all she has gone through this evening!" said Lady Redington. "Really, I have never known anyone like her."

"Nor I," cried Stephen with a good deal of feeling. "Elizabeth's a brick."

Inspector Bedison, thinking that he heard the taxi outside the house, could not help wondering whether after all the stars in their courses might not be fighting for Miss Dunlop.













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